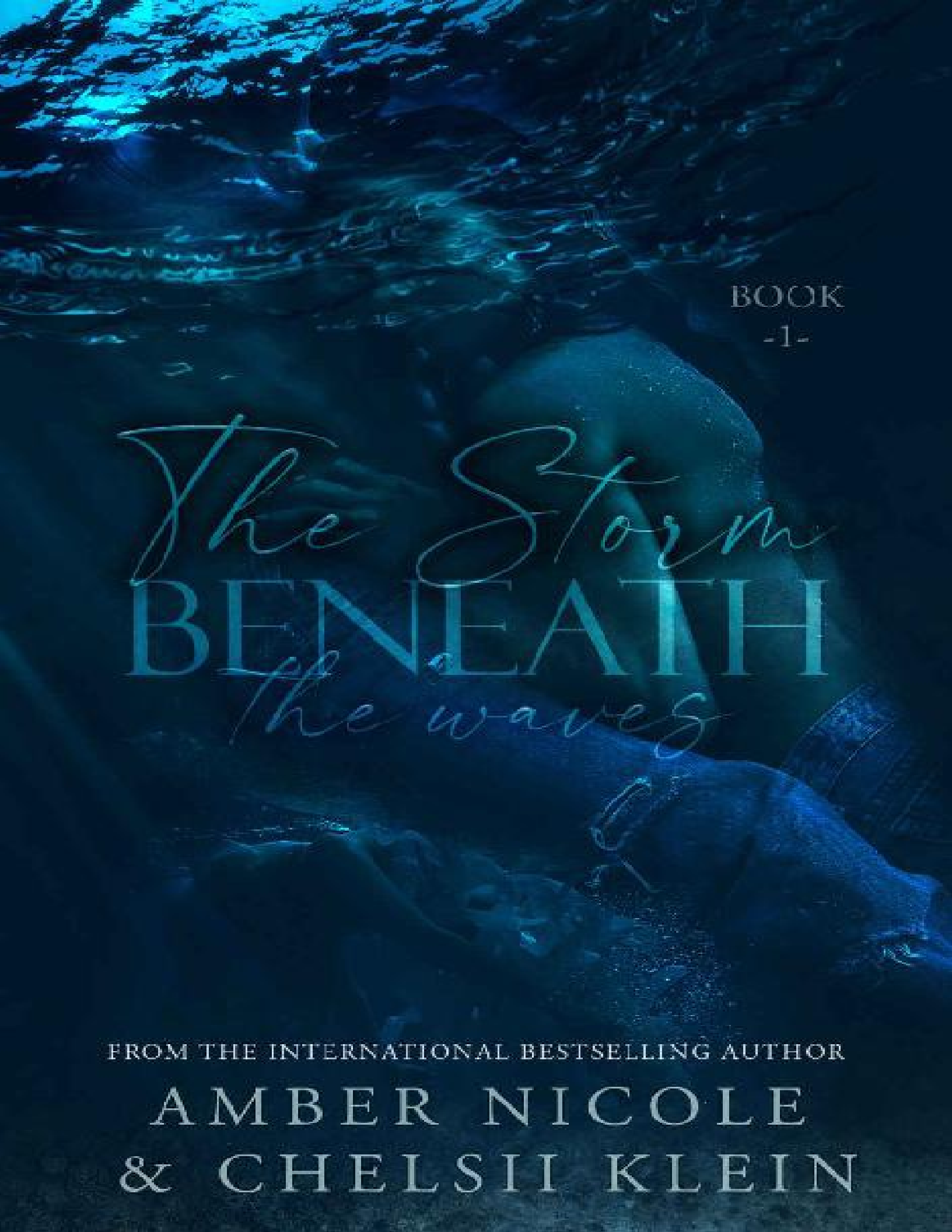
BOOK
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The Storm
BENEATH
the waves
FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR
AMBER NICOLE
& CHELSII KLEIN

The Storm Beneath The Waves

BY: AMBER NICOLE & CHELSII KLEIN

Book 1 of 3 in the Kelly Cove Secrets Series

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Nicole, Amber & Klein, Chelsii

The Storm Beneath The Waves

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Contents

Blurb:
Author's Note Amber Nicole
Dedication Amber Nicole
Author's Note Chelsii Klein
Dedication Chelsii Klein

Prologue
1. Skye
2. Caspian
3. Skye
4. Caspian
5. Skye
6. Elliot
7. Caspian
8. Skye
9. Elliot
10. Skye
11. Caspian
12. Elliot
13. Caspian
14. Elliot
15. Skye
16. Caspian
17. Skye
18. Skye
19. Elliot
20. Caspian
21. Skye
22. Elliot
23. Skye
24. Skye
25. Elliot
26. Skye
27. Caspian
28. Skye
29. Caspian
Epilogue

Afterword
Trigger Warnings
Thank You's From Amber & Chelsii
About the Author Amber Nicole
Also By Amber Nicole
About Author Chelsii Klein
Also By Chelsii Klein

Blurb:

High school is hard, but being a single, teenage mom makes it almost unbearable.

I can't wait to graduate and leave this cove full of heartache and judgment far behind me.

I want to explore the ocean and all that it has to offer.

Well, that's my plan, anyway. Until my heart gets involved.

After losing my soulmate to the sea, I never expected to fall in love again.

Let alone with two guys. One from my past, the other a broody, mysterious bad boy.

Where did he come from, and why is he so intent on claiming me?

They say to keep the sharks below your board. Maybe I should have listened.

A war is brewing beneath the waves, fighting to destroy everything I know and love. Determined to take my soul once more.

Some worlds are never meant to be discovered.

But I won't let the sea win this time. They can't have him.

The Storm Beneath the Waves is book one in an expected three book series with a prequel to come at a later date. This is a dark, why-choose spin on The Little Mermaid, with content and language for audiences eighteen years and older.

This book will have triggering content as well. Please read all warnings before proceeding.

18+

Author's Note Amber Nicole

Hey everyone, just me. I wanted to thank you all for continuing to support me through this new adventure of mine. All your kind words and reviews mean the world to me and give me the motivation to keep writing.

Please note: this book is a dark book which contains potential triggers. If you are unsure, please flip to the very back of the book for a detailed list (This will contain spoilers)

Also this book does contain MM references. So if you do not like MM please don't read on.

Now this is a reverse harem, why choose romance, which means that Skye will have more than one love interest and her harem will grow throughout the series. Though this book is MFM.

This is book 1 in the Kelly Cove Secrets series so there will be a cliffhanger—I know I know, I'm sorry, but we promise to have an HEA at the end of the series!

If this seems to catch your fancy then please jump on in!

I hope you love Skye and her guys as much as we do.

Love you all,

Amber Nicole

Dedication Amber Nicole

This book is dedicated to my husband Logan, who still stands by me every day supporting this dream and encouraging me to step out of my comfort zone and try new things.

To my children, I know you hate every time my computer comes out and I have to go into a bubble, but I do this for you. I love you both and thank you for pushing me to succeed.

Also

To my family, thank you so much for everything you have done these past few months: helping me get through this time and especially taking the kids on the weekends so I could finish this book. Love you all so much.

Author's Note Chelsii Klein

Thank you all for reading our co-write!

Writing the POV of Caspian (Ian), and getting to come up with the Siren and Nix Kingdoms was amazing! I hope you all love these characters as much as I do! I can't wait to see where this series takes us!

Dedication Chelsii Klein

Book number 7!! Wow!! I can’t believe it and I wouldn’t be here without the support of my husband, children, friends and family! Thank you all for your continued support and love for my passion! It means the world to me!

“We cannot stop the waves of grief from coming. But we can learn to surf them.”
-Glen Love

Prologue

"Brady!" I scream at the dark empty sea. Where is he? I turn to grab my board and go search the waves when I hear a sound.

"SKYE!" Brady shouts in a panic, then nothing but the waves crashing against the shore greet my ears. I run into the water, leaving my board on the sand, before diving deep in the direction I heard his voice, but the blackness of the water makes it impossible to know where I'm going. Not to mention the current is unbelievably strong tonight. Why did he have to go night surfing? I was fine just being wrapped in his incredible body under the stars. We won't have any more nights alone together. School starts back up soon, and I know the swim team will take up all of his time. I kick my legs hard, reaching the surface to gulp in some much needed breaths. "Brady. This isn't funny," I choke out. He better not be pulling another prank on me. I bob along with the waves for a few moments, waiting for him to pop up and give me his teasing smirk, but it never comes. My heart races and a sharp pain pricks along my spine. "Brady. Please!" I scream once more. I start to breaststroke across the water harder, kicking my feet. I'm too far out now. The shoreline is barely visible from where I am.

Salty tears stream from my eyes, mixing with the salt from the sea. Where is he? I use my arms and legs to spin around, but it's so dark, the stars even seem to be dull all of a sudden. I take a deep inhale and dive under once more, but the waves push me to the shore. I fight as hard as I can, but there's no point. I'm too weak.

The jagged reef scraping against my bare leg has my mouth opening in a silent scream of pain. Fuck, that's going to hurt tomorrow. I crawl onto the beach and cough up a lung full of the bitter water, then climb to my feet and limp right back in.

"Sky—" Brady gurgles, but I can't find him among the waves. A thrashing set of arms catches my eye, barely visible in the darkness, too far out to see properly. He's in the complete opposite direction that I just was. Is this really happening right now? Or am I just having a terrifying nightmare? This can't be real. We were just kissing and talking about our future.

His arms wave around frantically, before disappearing under again. Oh my God, no.

Preparing to dive under once more, a large object hits my knees. The sight before me has bile rising in my throat.

"BRADY!!!" I scream until my voice turns hoarse, and my eyes are so blurred with tears I can no longer see. I fall to my knees and clutch his board with white knuckles. Silence. The crash of the waves is all I can hear. "Someone help me!!" I scream.

LIGHTS SHINE all around me and boats pull into the endless sea. Everyone is talking at once, but I don't comprehend a word they're saying. "Please," I whisper over and over again, to whom, I don't know.

He's gone. He was just here. I can't believe he left me.

Skye

CHAPTER ONE

“Girl, get up, come on; the waves look incredible right now. Throw a bikini on, and meet me at the cove in ten.” My best friend Meg shouts at me while tossing what I assume is a bikini at my head. I roll over and check my phone.

“It's five am.” I groan and rub my eyes, forcing them to stay open. I’m exhausted. The nightmares that plague me have been cutting into my sleep. I should try and get another hour, but the waves call to me, and if I get up now, I can have two solid hours of peace before I have to get Sebastian up. His grandma is expecting him at eight am sharp. She is a stickler about time, but since Brady passed away, his mom has been a huge help with watching him so I can work and save up for our future.

I take a deep breath and force my body to move away from my comfortable bed. It's like this every morning. I love the surf and ocean once I’m out there, though sometimes it’s hard to come back in after. But getting up and out there is always a chore. I don’t think I actually got to bed until after midnight. Sometimes when I’m having a bad night, I go and sit beside Sebastian’s crib and just watch him. The softness of his breath relaxes me and calms me enough to fall asleep.

Making a quick stop in the bathroom, I throw my suit on and toss my hair up into a messy bun before peeking in on him. He’s sound asleep with his thumb in his mouth and tiny butt in the air. I can’t help the water that blurs my eyes every time I see him. A perfect mix of me and his father. A reminder that Brady will never meet him.

I glance at the ceiling, letting the tears fall. Some days are better than most. I don’t know if I will ever truly move on, or if I even want to. I’m afraid if I do, the memories will start to fade away, and that’s just something I’m not ready for.

Sebastian wiggles, his thumb pops out as he starts babbling in his sleep, pulling my attention back to him, and it brings a smile to my face. I wipe my cheeks and step closer, quietly bending down to press a soft kiss to his temple. His baby scent washes over me and brings a small piece of joy to my dark world.

This little man saved my life. After losing Brady, I didn't know if I could go on anymore. It may make me sound melodramatic, but he was my other half. My soulmate. The one I always saw myself growing old with. Not drowning at the young age of seventeen after a night of passion. The night our little guy was conceived.

I watch my son for a few more moments, then shut his door. Wiping my face of the tears once more, I grab my phone and shoot my sister Nina a quick text, letting her know I'll be at the cove. She's still asleep, but she's always been a light sleeper. If Sebastian wakes before her, she will hear, and get him up for me. But really by this point, I probably don't even need to warn her, she does this for me every morning. It's become our routine.

Nina is my little sister and one of my best friends. She's technically my half-sister, but that's never mattered. We have different moms and are only six months apart. Yeah, Dad is a bit of the free love type. He's never settled down, but he is an amazing father and grandfather to Sebastian.

Nina's mom was a young, professional surfer, who wasn't ready to give up her career to raise her daughter, so she signed over her rights to my father the day she was born. We have been inseparable ever since, and I am so blessed to have her. I don't know what I would have done if she wasn't by my side during the last year.

Our father Cal owns Oceanic, the local beachside bar and diner. It's where I work during the summers and weekends during the school year. People ask me if it's pointless to work there since, technically, my dad is supporting us anyways.

I mean, yeah, he writes my checks, but I make awesome tips, and it gives me flexible hours. It's not my dream to waitress there for the rest of my life, but it contributes to the bills, and I was pretty much raised in that place.

Passing the kitchen, I notice Meg left me a banana and a protein shake on the counter. She lives on the mainland but stays in our guesthouse most nights. Besides my family, Brady's best friend Elliot, and her, I don't have many people these days. Not counting Arielle, Brady's mom. She's like my mom too–since I never met mine. Supposedly, she had to leave when I was very young, but I've never heard the whole story. I think it's too painful for my dad to talk about.

I grab the fruit, taking a bite while shuffling through the back door and down the stairs to the sand. Looking over the horizon, the sun is just starting to rise. Perfect time to catch some waves.

I let out a deep sigh and close my eyes. The soft breeze and soundtrack of the waves calms me. This is why I wake up at the ass crack of dawn. The oranges and pinks rising above the clear turquoise ocean is always a sight to see. It brings me a moment of peace.

I pull my board from the rack on the side of the house, take the last bite of my banana and toss the peel in the fire pit, before racing down to the cove. Tingles run up my spine, stopping me in my tracks. Glancing around, I see nothing out of the ordinary, but I can't stop the shiver coursing through me as though I'm being watched. This isn't the first time I've felt this way, and it's been happening more frequently.

I spin one more time taking in my surroundings, and rub my eyes with a groan. There is no one there. Meg is in the distance facing away from me, waxing her board, so I know it's not her. Turning towards the water, I still don't see anything, but I do feel an odd sensation pulling me to walk in–like a siren's call.

The sea has always called to me, but lately, the call is getting stronger. With a melancholy sigh, my thoughts change to thinking of our future. Just one more year of high school, then Sebastian and I are going on an adventure. I don't know where it will take us, but I do know that we both need this. There is so much heartbreak in these waters that maybe getting away will be good.

Shaking myself out of my stupor, I race down to Meg, plopping my board onto the sand, and grab a wax, giving the deck a good coat. I've been off my game lately, so hopefully, a good waxing will help with my traction.

"Hey babes, did you get any sleep last night?" Meg asks, probably noticing the bags under my eyes. I release a small chuckle and shake my head.

"What is sleep, Meg? I'm an eighteen year old single mom with a six month old. Not to mention the nightmares that keep me up. I'm lucky if I can manage four, maybe five hours."

She goes to talk, but I wave her away with a smile. "It's my new normal, babes, don't worry. How about we hit these kickass waves? I'm going for a pipeline today."

She hops up and grabs her board, taking off before I even finish my sentence. She has yet to get a pipeline this year, and I know it bugs her that I nailed one in the beginning of the summer. I throw my wax on the wrapper, then lift my board and haul ass after her. The moment the waves brush against the soles of my feet, my shoulders relax. A smile graces my lips, and I laugh. There is just something about the water that brings me peace and contentment.

I SIT ON MY BOARD, kicking my feet into the cool ocean on my sides, waiting for the perfect swell. The waves are calm today, a complete opposite to that night. The night I made one of the stupidest decisions of my life.

"Elliot, I don't think I should be here," I say for the fifth time tonight as I try and keep up with his pace. Doesn't he see my huge belly and swollen feet? I'm practically waddling like a dumb penguin right now.

"Skye, babe, stop. You need to be here. This is a celebration of Brady's life. And you were his whole life," he repeats again. You would think that statement brought me joy, but all it did was make me want to curl up under the covers and sob again.

Like I haven't been doing just that for the last six months. Like I haven't been hanging on by a thread. Forcing myself to just get up in the mornings. To eat and not starve my baby. I don't know how much longer I can go on like this. I take a deep breath and sigh.

"Okay, but can you please promise me something?" I ask, pulling him to a stop. I need to rest for a minute, before we climb the dune to the bonfire by the water. I release his hand and bend at the waist for a moment, taking in some much needed breaths. Damn, I'm really out of shape these days.

"Anything Lil' Mama, you know that," he says, before gently rubbing my back. I stand back up with his help because the beach ball under my dress makes me a little top-heavy before gazing into his caramel-colored eyes and sighing once more.

"Don't leave me alone tonight. I don't care if you party, but please. I... I just can't handle Pearl and Bonnie right now." He steps closer, wrapping his arms around my shoulders, and pulls

me into a hug.

"Absolutely, Skye. Plus, Nina and Meg will be there too. Let's just have some fun, okay. Pretty soon the baby will be here, and we will never see you." He gives me a pout, and I roll my eyes.

"Seriously? I don't think I will ever be rid of you, E." I tell him, and he smirks before running his hand down his abs suggestively. I let out a small laugh and shake my head. His silly antics don't even phase me anymore.

"Do you see this rock-hard body? I am a babe magnet. One day someone is going to snatch me up. Then I can go live my own life and stop living vicariously through you and Bra—," he trails off, ending the joke remembering that Brady is no longer here and my life is nothing to live vicariously through. "I'm so sorry—" he starts, but I give him a small smile, wiping a tear that escaped.

"Yeah, I know, E. Let's just get this bullshit over with, yeah?" I ask, then start walking once more. Footsteps sound behind me, but they hold a bit of sadness in their path. Seems to be the new normal these days.

We come across the sand dunes to where they are hosting a celebration of my love's life. We had a funeral after they never recovered Brady's body, but I couldn't stay long. I ended up in excruciating pain, which led to an emergency room visit, where we all found out I was pregnant. A miracle in itself since I was told at a young age I couldn't have children. Endometriosis and PCOS are a bitch. I think I'm still in a bit of shock and denial.

A hand grabs mine and tugs me closer to where our friends are circled around the fire. The laughter and chaos immediately quiets, and I know I should never have come. I mean, it's not like I was even invited.

"What the fuck is she doing here?" Pearl snaps at Elliot. He tugs me closer as he feels me trying to turn around and leave. "She is the reason we are having this bullshit celebration." I look at my feet, avoiding all the eyes on me.

"How can you say that?" Elliot barks, gripping my hand tighter, almost to the point of pain. "She was his life. She's carrying his child, for fuck's sake. How could you ever blame her for his drowning? Have you really become so heartless, Pearl?" A few people snicker, and someone mutters "slut" under their breath.

I bite my lip, trying to hold back the sobs that want to escape. "How do we even know she's having his baby? Once a slut, always a slut," Pearl snaps back at Elliot.

My body shakes as I lift my eyes, showing everyone the hurt and pain that shines in them. Coral winces and looks off towards the water. A few others step back, and some even leave, but Pearl and Bonnie stand there like they have a point to prove.

"I should just leave, Elliot. I told you this was a bad idea." I whisper softly for his ears only, but of course, she heard me.

"Yeah, bitch, get the fuck out of here. Brady never loved you. He pitied you and was planning to dump your ass at the end of the summer. He finally had enough of your clinginess." She gives me an evil grin, laughing as I step back, spin on my heel, and stumble away.

"Skye, wait!" Elliot hollers, but I just can't be there any longer. I need to leave. This town… this life. I just can't keep going on anymore. I'm barely holding on these days, and Pearl may have just pushed me over the edge.

I walk to where I last saw Brady and keep moving over towards Kelly Cliff. A place where way too many memories reside and the perfect place to spend my last moments on this Earth. I glance over my shoulder, checking that I'm still alone. Not paying attention, I trip over a rock and land on

my knees, just on the edge of the cliff, almost falling over.

If I wasn't crying so hard, I might be able to see better. It's dark, but the stars are out, shining above. They're taunting me of a better time, a happier time when Brady and I used to lie under them and talk about our future. About marriage and children. He wouldn't cheat on me. I know deep in my heart what Pearl was insinuating was lies, but at this moment, I just don't care. I climb to my feet and look down at the crashing waves below me. Waves that helplessly swallowed the only boy I loved.

"Why Brady? Why did you have to leave me?" I scream at the endless sea in front of me. Once my oasis, it's now a dark and haunting Hell. "I can't do this without you. I don't know how to live without you," I sob to no one but the waves. I let my grief wash over me, and stand, moving closer to the edge. Who says I can't be with him again? I glance down at my rounded belly, and rub it gently, sobbing. I can't raise this baby alone when I can barely take care of myself. I'm not meant to be a mom. I can't do this without him. I glance down once more at the once crashing waves, now still as if inviting me to join them.

I take a look behind me, one last time, at the bonfire I can spot in the distance, where my sister and Elliot await. "I'm sorry," I whisper to the wind before looking at the endless sea. "I'm coming, Brady."

The moment my feet dropped into the air, I instantly regretted it. The harsh cold water pulled me down until I couldn't breathe. My long black dress weighing me down. I thought I really was going to join Brady, wherever he was, but strong arms grabbed me tight and pulled me to the surface just as I passed out.

I regained consciousness on the shore with a blurry figure giving me mouth to mouth and CPR while repeating, "Please, hold on. I can't lose you." In my delirious state, I thought it was Brady. But I now know that that isn't possible. As much as I wish things were different… Brady is gone. Forever lost to the sea.

"Girl, let's go," Meg shouts, pulling me back to the moment. She's on the shore already. Fuck, I really need to stop zoning out. Especially while I'm out this deep. I may have once wanted to fade away, but now I know what a mistake that would have been. A life I would have missed. I may still have dark thoughts every now and then, but I have to stay strong. I'm not alone anymore, and Sebastian deserves the world. Plus, someone must have thought it wasn't my time as well.

I had every intention of joining Brady that night, but someone saved me, and to this day, I still don't know who. The only clue is the melodic voice that still haunts my dreams.

Caspian

CHAPTER TWO

Life in the ocean may seem like it's amazing, but ever since I was a youngling, I've been in a constant battle between the land and sea. It's not because one place is better than the other, but because of the nature of my being-*my blood.* Half-human. Half-siren. They call my kind, *Kaimans,* or in layman's terms, half-bloods. If it weren't for my father being the ruler of the Kai Kingdom, I'm sure I would be treated like dirt, just like all the other half-bloods.

I don't really give a shit either way, and since the king is still planning on me being his successor, I guess it doesn't really matter to him either. It certainly didn't matter to him when he fucked my Human mother, just to leave her right after she gave birth and steal me from her arms.

A wave crashing against my spine snaps me out of my mind and back to the present, where I slowly tread water and watch my muse from afar. She runs through the sand, heading down to the shore where another female awaits. It's the same place and time every morning, which is the exact place on land that I'm drawn to.

It wasn't until I saw her riding a surfboard, and commanding the waves like she was born from Kai, that I was completely obsessed. Or was it her pouty lips, bright green eyes, tanned skin, and long brown hair? Maybe it's all of it combined? Regardless, there is something about her. I can tell when she enters the water no matter if I'm close or far away. Her blood sings to mine. And worse, I can tell when she leaves it. It's like a hole punched straight through my chest. Since I first saw her, I knew right then and there that it was never the land…*but her,* that I was drawn to. Everything about her has my nerves screaming.

Screaming to touch her.

Be close to her.

Taste her...but I don't. I keep my distance.

For now.

I hear when the people in our Kingdom talk about the mating bond, but I've never discovered it myself, never really gave a shit to explore it either. But I wonder if this is what it feels like? And if so, how the fuck can I stop a bond to a Human? And a Human that has already had offspring. It's unheard of. It's known our kind can only reproduce with their mate, and there is only ever one for each *Kaien.*

So is this just a simple infatuation with someone I am forbidden to have? I'm not really sure, and I won't know for certain until I have proof. Maybe if I get between her legs just once, I can get *her* out of my system. Stop whatever this craving is and move on with my life. My responsibilities.

My father wasn't too pleased when I first told him I would be taking a year off from my princely duties to find myself. I think the idea has grown on him though. He has an inkling about where I'm heading, but I don't care. I've done the politics, military training, and now the necessary arranged marriage crap.

The hate I have for Kassia is immense, but if I am about to be married off to that prissy-ass princess just for peace… *just* to be a pawn in this game, I'm going to get what I want first; and that is my muse I'm currently watching. She never sees me and that's the way it will stay until I'm ready for her to know about me. Because once it gets to that point, I'm not sure I'll be able to control myself around her.

My plans for my year away are simple. I am going to enroll at Kelly Cove High, and become a typical Human teenage boy. I'll find any way I can to interject myself into her life and get as close as possible to her. Really, how hard could it be? With everything my close friends know about the Human world and acting like a Human, it shouldn't be that difficult. It wouldn't be my first interaction with someone from the mainland.

I once met a boy on this very beach. He never knew what I was, but he did talk to me about his school swim team. He made it sound like it was a blast, and I love the water, so maybe I'll take the chance and try out. Since I'll have the powers finally after my eighteenth birthday to change into a man, I'll use that to my advantage.

A quick wave catches her off guard, and she falls into the water. Before I can react, vibrations of what feels like an electric current runs through the sea and hits me straight on. I brace for it so I'm ready, but it still strikes through my body, pushing both heat and pain through my muscles.

I clench my hands and grimace at the sting. Whatever this calling between us is, it's getting stronger and I have a feeling it's only going to get worse until she is physically mine. In the back of my head, I already knew this was a bond of sorts, but I'm not ready to admit it. It doesn't matter though–bond or not–I'd already made up my mind, and in one week's time, I will be saying goodbye to the Kai Kingdom for the next ten months and live here on land. In Kelly Cove.

And as much as my fiancée protests this idea, she doesn't have a say in the matter. She will never have a say in anything I do, much to what I'm sure will be her obvious dismay. I loathe her with every fiber of my being, and she can kiss my scale covered tail.

My muse dances with grace across the waves with the board under feet. Watching her, it's almost like the currents are at her beck and call, and they obey every command she makes. She glides so smoothly through every surge, I can almost imagine them parting just for her.

I don't realize how much time has passed while I have done nothing but stare at her, and all too soon she is leaving the water. Greeting who I believe to be a sibling and her son on the shore before

she walks away from me. Back to her Human world.

I dive under water and watch in contempt at the sea life teaming around me. Avoiding me, like always. It might be my current role as prince, or my half-blood nature that makes everyone turn the other way, but I refuse to allow it to get to me.

One week's time couldn't come soon enough. Then my muse and I can finally meet, and I can get some answers as to why I feel so connected to her. It's not going to be easy, nothing in life ever is. But I am more determined than ever to get close to her. Even if only for a fleeting moment.

It's time I go back to my own world. For now.

Skye

CHAPTER THREE

I paddle back to the shallow water, not bothering to ride a wave in. The water is starting to calm, and my dreams of getting another pipeline are washed away. Maybe tomorrow. I dive off my board and kick off the sandy bottom, resurfacing. I unhook the rope from my ankle and move it to my wrist, then start swimming to shore, with my board floating behind me.

Nina and Sebastian are waiting for me, and he looks like he's fighting to get down on the sand. For six months old, he's a chunk, and my poor sister's arms look like they may fall off soon. I grab my little man from Nina and smother him in kisses, causing him to giggle. I love that sound.

Moving towards my board my sister stops me. "I got it, you go take him inside. I've already changed him and fed him his breakfast. All you need to do is pack his bags for the day." I nod my head in acknowledgement and remove the rope from my wrist. I give her a smile then turn towards the house while bouncing Bash on my hip.

"Thanks! Don't know what I would do without you, Sis." I yell over my shoulder, shooting her a wink. She gives me a beaming grin, then shakes her head while laughing.

"Come on handsome, mommy needs to get ready for work too," I whisper in his ear. He looks up at me with eyes so bright and blue it makes me think of the Mediterranean sea. A place I have always wanted to visit. Hopefully one day soon we will.

I walk inside to the aroma of coffee and groan. Moving over to the playpen we have set up, I set him down with some toys, before making my way to the liquid gold. I don't have time to sip and enjoy it this morning, so I chug the bitter deliciousness down.

I spent way too much time on the water, but it was incredible. The sun rising over the waves and

the wind blowing through my hair is way more refreshing and energizing than any amount of coffee would be. My phone buzzes on the counter, and I have to jog to reach it before the call is missed. I slip and slide over the wet spots I left on the hardwood, making Bash giggle. I seriously love that sound.

"Hello?" I answer in a breathy tone, trying to calm down my racing heart.

"Hey babe, didn't think I would catch ya. Was planning on leaving you a message, but this works too. Why are you all out of breath?" Elliot, Brady's best friend questions.

"Slipped on some leftover water and almost bit it racing to answer the phone. What's up?" Chuckles sound from the other line. Does he have me on speaker?

"Careful Skye. We just got over your sprained pinkie finger. For someone who has grace on a board, you sure are accident prone on legs."

"Ha-ha, very funny. Hey E, listen, I'm running late, so can this wait?" I bend down and pick up Sebastian, taking him into my room so I can get ready. I set him on the bed and flip my phone on speaker.

One good thing about working on the beach is I can leave my suit on. I'll just be in the water on my lunch break anyway. Hopefully. I grab my T-shirt, and shorts off the bed and tug them up my slightly damp thighs.

"Oh right, just wanted to see if you still wanted me to watch the little man tomorrow. Don't you have to enroll back into school? It will be nice seeing your face again in the halls." I pause. Crap! What is today's date?

"Um." I bite my nail and think. "Yeah that would be great, thanks E. I totally forgot. I should just continue online since I've gotten used to it, but I miss being in classes and seeing you guys too."

I sigh. I understood being in high school and being pregnant wasn't ideal, but I never thought they would ask me to leave, or even move me to online classes only. Hadn't I been through enough? My eyes start to blur, and I shut them, willing the tears to go away. "I'll see you tomorrow, Elliot. I have to leave for work and drop Bash off at his grandma's," I say in a shaky voice.

"All right, babe, catch ya later." I hang up the phone, grab the diaper bag I packed last night, swoop up a yawning baby, and carry him out to my car. Wow, it's only eight am, and I've already cried more than once. I hope that's not an omen for how today is going to be.

A CRASH SOUNDS from behind me, and I cringe. That is the third platter she has dropped just this week. At this rate, Dad will need to find another replacement.

"Macey, hey, why don't you go take your fifteen minute break. I'll handle your section," I offer, coming over to her side to help her clean up the mess. She sighs, shoves her notepad in my hand and moves outside, leaving me to pick up all the broken dishes and spilled food. *Lovely, just what I wanted to do today.*

I throw the last of the broken plates in the trash bin, then slide over to the sink to wash my hands. Mark comes around the corner, bumping his hip against mine and shoots me a wink. He has the mop in his hand and the bucket by his feet.

"Thank you!" I give him a beaming smile, and he bows his head a little, grumbling, "No

problem." The tips of his ears pink, and I turn away from him with a soft laugh, grabbing some paper towels to dry my hands off.

He is seriously adorable in a nerdy, shy way. And he has been a godsend to my father and me. Especially during the crazy summer rush. I really think he and Nina would be so cute together. A thought for later.

I turn and grab the notepad then move over to some regulars I've known since I was young.

"Hey Wave, so your food will be right up, we had a bit of an accident. Can I get ya anything else in the meantime? On the house, of course." Wave–real name Walter–just chuckles and leans back in the booth.

"Darling, don't," he says with a swish of his hand, gesturing for me to take the seat next to him. I sit and can't stop the groan from slipping out. I love this job; I've been helping dad out since I was able to carry a tray, but it kills my feet. I slide my slip-on shoes off and wiggle my toes. *Ah that feels nice.*

"So the new girl caused another mess?" he says, startling me. I was too lost in having the sensation return to my toes. I place my hand on my chest, willing my heart to slow before responding.

"Yeah. Third time this week. At least you know the drill and won't ream me out, like some of the mean girls from school did the other day." I close my eyes and squeeze my upper nose, then run my hand down my face.

"Girls still giving you a hard time? Don't let them get to you Skye. You are an amazing young woman and mother. Do you think they could handle everything you went through and still be working and keeping their grades up? I can tell you now. They would be a mess, and you, my girl, are not."

If he only knew. Once again moisture fills my eyes. Gah, I'm just so emotional today. I give him a shaky smile, put my shoes back on, and stand.

"Thanks Wave. I needed that. I will put a rush on your food." I bend down and give him a quick hug, then make my way to the kitchen. I tell Carla, our chef, to add some extra helpings of fried clams to Wave's order, then lean back against the counter and wait.

The lunch crowd is just about done, and then I can leave. I need to make a stop at the mall to pick up some new clothes for school, before getting Sebastian. I have thankfully lost a lot of the baby weight, but I'm still a bit curvier than I was pre-Bash.

"Orders up girl," Carla hollers, even though I'm close by. I think that's one of her favorite perks of working the kitchen. She loves yelling when the food is ready.

"Thanks Carla, you wouldn't want to throw together a reuben for me would you?" I ask her with a wink while grabbing the platter.

"You got it babe," she hollers once again, making me giggle under my breath.

I drop off the food, then move to some empty tables, and start bussing them. I pick up the tips and put them in my pocket to give to Macey, whenever she decides to come back and grace me with her help. It's been way longer now than the fifteen minutes we are required by law to give her. I drop the dishes off in the kitchen and move outside to check on her, but the alley is empty. Maybe she went for a walk.

"Skye!" someone shouts from inside.

"Coming," I yell back, then slam the door shut. I walk into the kitchen to the most delicious creation known to man on a plate just for little ole me. I take a huge bite and have to hold back the obscene moan that almost left my lips.

"Amazing as always Carla," I say with my mouth full. She rolls her eyes at me and gets back to her orders. I dig in and have that thing devoured in minutes. Carla drops off some onion rings and a

side of ranch with a wink. She seriously gets me.

I check the clock again for the fifteenth time in an hour while wiping the grease from my fingers. Looks like I'll be pulling a double shift today. So much for getting some shopping done. The relief in Macey's eyes should have forewarned me that she wouldn't be returning. I slowly shuffle over to the office and knock on the door.

"Enter," my dad shouts from inside. I take a deep breath in and then out, turning the knob; he's not going to like this.

"Hey Dad," I say with an overly bright smile on my face and pop my head in the door.

"Hey kiddo, what's up?" He tosses some papers aside and gives me his full attention. I glance at the wall over his head, avoiding his gaze.

"So… Macey left, I offered to let her take her fifteen minute break, and she never returned, so..." I trail off, and he sighs.

"I'll put the 'Help Wanted' sign up again." I look his way, raising my brows in surprise. That went better than I thought. "I know you have stuff to do this afternoon, but can you stick around another hour? I'll see if Paul can jump in."

He runs his hand down his face, and I can't help but notice how exhausted he looks. I know the past year has been rough on him, and I didn't help matters.

"Of course Dad, you know I will. Always." He stands and gives me a tight hug. I can't help but breathe in his sea salt and grease scent. It truly is a comfort.

"I love ya kiddo." He gives me one more squeeze, then moves back to his desk to call Paul. I leave his office and stride back to the dining room. Today is never going to end.

I PULL into the driveway of a cute little light blue bungalow along the water and smile. Brady always loved this house. He said one day we would have one just like this. Our own little slice of heaven. God, I miss him. Every night before bed, I go down to the cove.

To the last spot I saw him alive. Just to talk, tell him about my day, or about his son, and sometimes to leave a photo in the shallow water. I sit there and watch it float away into the dark depths of the unknown. Into the storm beneath the waves. His new home.

I put the car in park and climb out before walking inside. "There's my handsome guy," I say to the cutest baby on Earth the moment I walk in the front door. I look up at Brady's mom. "How was he?" She just chuckles and waves the question away.

"Perfect as always. The question is, how are you, dear? You look exhausted." I pick him up from off the play mat and sit down on the couch with a sigh.

"Macey just quit, walked out without telling a soul. Who does that? I hope Dad makes a note in her file." I lean my head back and rest my baby on my chest. I can't help but breathe in his shampoo, the tension slowly leaving my body. The cushion dips next to me, and Arielle runs her nails through my hair gently. She has always been like a mom to me and taken care of us when we needed her.

"Hmmm, how about if I come down and help out for a while? Not forever, but just until we can get your dad's restaurant back on track?" A warm tingle runs through my temple, causing me to relax even more. I nod my head in agreement. Honestly, whatever she asked of me right now, I would

probably say yes to. She just has that calming ability.

"Great, then it's settled. I'll pop in tomorrow," she exclaims before getting up off the couch, snapping me from my relaxed state, even Sebastian jolts awake. My brows furrow in confusion as I give her a once-over, but she seems fine.

That was odd. I must really be out of it. I stand and say goodbye, then load him into the car and head home. Dinner, then bedtime. Today was horribly long, and tomorrow won't be much better. Senior year registration. Fun…*not!*

Caspian

CHAPTER FOUR

Kelby and one of my advisors, Daryn, rush me as soon as I'm within sight of the castle.

"King Airewn and Queen Adrina are here requesting a formal hearing," Daryn says.

I can feel there's more. "And?"

Daryn flinches. "Someone's in a pissy mood. Ease up man." Kelby slaps me on the back, and it takes all my strength not to break his hand. I look into his eyes with my own slitted ones and he backs off. "And… Kassia is also here."

I stop swimming and consider going back to land. Instead a growl breaks from my lips. "I just love how they have to pull this shit at the last minute. A formal hearing? How did that get past a request for a simple hearing?"

Kelby throws back a laugh, and his orange hair floats around his face, distracting me with its bright contrast of color compared to the dull features around us. This far down—until you get into the Kingdom where the castle shines a bright silver light—it's nothing but bottom feeders and darkness. We leave it that way to ward off the discovery of Humans. Our attuned eyes are the only reason we can see so well in the dark. "You know this is a last-ditch effort to stop you from leaving. She's tried just about everything else to stop you."

"Accusing you of rape to get you locked up," Daryn starts ticking off all the shit I've been through with her over the last six months. "Setting a bunch of squids loose in Draiton to ruin your progress on the shelter. Having weird ass fainting spells and then trying to get a sea witch to say you can't be too far from her because you're her long-lost love."

"Yeah, man, can't you have her locked up for being a crazy bitch? Isn't there such a thing as false

accusations?" Kelby asks, nodding along with Daryn's unfinished but still impressive list of hell this girl has put me through.

"Not when our marriage is the only thing preventing a war. My father wants to expand our Kingdom, and he'll get it one way or another. I guess our soldiers are just lucky the Nix have a crazy ass daughter that can be traded for peace and expansion."

I run a hand down my face to help school my pissed off expression that seems to deepen the closer we get to the castle. Reminding me of all the shit she's put us through isn't going to calm me before facing her again; if I have to see her and her psychotic parents, I'll need to be calm and smart.

The one unique thing about the Nix species is their cunningness and their ability–albeit small ability–to cast. They have a small portion of mind control in their blood. It's hard to tell when it's happening, but luckily they can't hold it for long. It's supposed to be illegal within their community and considered treason if done on someone within the Siren community, but they still do it. At least Kassia does, anyways. Thankfully, it's never worked on me. Maybe it's my pure hatred for her?

"And, what about Draiton?" Daryn asks.

My muscles clench along with my heart. Draiton is close to me for a number of reasons that both Kelby and Daryn know, and leaving it behind is the one thing, along with these assholes, that I'll miss. The Siren community keeps getting smaller and smaller as the years go on, and no matter what we do, we can't expand. Without a true mate, we can't reproduce, and until we can explore and expand our outreach, more and more matches are left unmade.

The Nix Kingdom surrounds us and without war or this marriage, we will suffer. Whereas Nix and Sirens were once banned to procreate, now with my marriage to Kassia, that rule will be abolished and both communities will flourish. Or so my parents think. I'd rather lay waste to the Nix Kingdom and their vile ways if it meant everyone is happy, and I don't have to marry that psychotic wench.

Draiton was my idea to help match orphans with parents in our community. Orphans were previously locked up and left in prison cells until they reached a reasonable age of work. This has always been the ways of both Nix and Siren to prevent children from swimming off and getting caught by the Humans with no one to watch them and no accountability.

I've always hated it…hated that children, babies, and even infants get thrown into piss poor dungeons with minimum care, food, and no love–just to keep them out of the way. One of my missions for change when I take the throne is to change that law. *The Orphan Law*.

When I brought it upon the council, my step-mother was thrilled, but my father told me that to make changes you have to first be the change and that being King was less about orders and more about doing the work yourself. Sometimes he can be worthy of his position, like in that instance. Most times, he's just a dick.

But I was serious about making some changes, so I came up with an Orphanage community idea. I would build a number of shelters throughout the Siren community, and I will leave in charge real caregivers to care for them and help them grow. With the increasing number of mate-less Sirens who grow old without children, I decided to open them up to pairing.

Just because these Sirens can't find their mate doesn't mean they don't eventually get married and try to be happy with their spouse, but they still wish for the one thing they can't have…children of their own.

So Draiton is my first community shelter, and we will cut the ribbon on it the day before I leave. I've worked hard to put caregivers in there that I know with every fiber of my being will take care of them and raise them properly until adoption. I just hope my time away doesn't hinder its growth.

The one problem we haven't been able to fix with the orphans, Draiton or not, is how there even *are orphans* when Sirens are struggling to procreate. Where are these mystery children coming from?

I tune back in to my friends when we reach the gate. "With you two in charge, I have no doubt it will flourish."

Clanging on shells alerts everyone that I'm back as we swim through the castle and straight for the throne room. "You never answered how this suddenly became a formal hearing?" I ask, looking at Daryn.

He swallows hard, a sign he's nervous. "I was ordered not to bother you with the request when it was first sent to the council."

Liquid lava shoots through my veins, and I want to yell out and punch someone, but I clench my fists instead and control it, *barely*. "Why?" He opens his mouth, but I interrupt. "Who?"

Daryn and Kelby both give each other quick glances, and I don't need to hear their answer. Fucking snake… Lucian and his damn obsession with the throne. To be honest, I could care less about taking the throne; but if it was mine, *it was mine*.

How low does a Siren need to go to scheme, plot, and act like some damn second-grade villain in a bad story to try and take someone's crown? And we all know that's what it is. He swims around like he owns the place, being the cousin to the king, but really, no one can stand him. I can't wait to throw his ass out as soon as I'm in charge.

I huff and push hard at the doors, opening them myself, when normally a guard would do it for me, but it's apparent that this bullshit hearing has already started. I swim to my throne, ignoring the gasps of fake surprise from the council and the sighs of real fangirls from the staff. It is the same every time. My existence would always be a constant struggle between hate and love. Just like my blood.

No sooner than Kassia looks back and sees me, she drops to the polished floor of the castle and bows for no more than show. "Oh, my love has arrived!" She continues to do this weird up and down bow that looks like the one commoners do. I make no show of how I want to tail smash her right upside the head and instead keep swimming until I get to my throne.

"Get up right now and act your station." I can hear her mother hiss at her before I turn and sit in my spot to the right of my own mother. My parents both wear the traditional dark blue silks with pearls. It's what I would have put on had I known in advance about this hearing.

"Show respect," Mom whispers at me, and I get up with barely contained anger, giving the Nix Queen and King a proper bow as I take in their red coral attire with painted gold shells in it. It's tacky as hell.

The Nix Queen, Adrina, is beautiful like all royalty, but she has a sinister look about her, like she can't be trusted, or as if she's always plotting. I know it's more than our community's thousand-year-old hatred for one another and likely to do with her one raised brow, shifty eyes, red hair she wears in a spiked fashion atop her head like a villain, and the dismissive look she gives anyone she thinks is less. Which just happens to be us.

It pisses me off that my parents allow her to come in here with that look on her face like she's above us, even though we are the ones that sit on the thrones above them. And her husband is worse. He wears a look of permanent disdain and always has to shout, growl or hiss when he talks, like he's more animal than merman. Which I guess the Nix are in a way. Add in their vertical, slitted eyes that mimic a sea snake, and their evil looks match their blood.

"Love, are you okay? You worried me when you weren't here on time." Kassia asks out of turn. I may be ill-informed about what this bullshit hearing was, but I doubt it has anything to do with my where-abouts.

"I'm fine," I answer back without emotion. I love the fake show she puts on for her parents, but when she catches me alone, that annoying, concerned fiancée voice disappears, and in its place is a stuck-up bitch tone that she uses to try and order me around or seduce me with.

My father clears his throat before waving his hand. "Right. Please proceed."

A council member from our left approaches. "We are gathered here to formally listen to the dire complaints of the Nix Princess Kassia against her fiancé Prince Caspian."

I almost laugh. Another fucking attempt to keep me from leaving. Luckily, I can show some restraint, unlike Kassia, who is trying to give me an evil smile from her lowered head. Bitch.

"A royal engagement period for the Nix community is to be held for a full three months, and within that time of courting, all members of the engagement are not allowed to leave from the same kingdom."

I hear my mom sigh next to me. They are no doubt sick of this shit, just like I am. On the way in, I saw lines of commoners, our Siren community, that were waiting for a chance to air their grievances with their King and Queen, and instead, they've had to wait because of this bullshit.

Before the council member can continue reading from what looks like a rather large piece of coral parchment, my father swims up. "Enough!"

The council member startles slightly, and without another word, he swims back to his position.

"Tryton," my mother quietly warns as she puts a hand on his arm to calm him–a gesture she shouldn't make, but one that works all the same. She's his calm, and it works to ease his anger.

He huffs, looks at me, and then back at the Nix King, who holds a smug expression. "Request denied," my father announces.

Adrina's jaw drops as Kassia audibly pouts, and Airewn goes into a rage. *Here we go*. "And why does my daughter not deserve a proper royal engagement? Isn't she already putting enough on the line for this union of Kingdoms?"

"You knew the circumstances when you agreed to this arrangement, Airewn. I will not break a deal with my son, who is to rule over both kingdoms in our stead, for some romantic gesture when this is not that! This is political at best! No two ways about it that *this* union is abnormal, and every law has been broken to make it happen, but here we are! He will get his time on land, or there is no union!" He roars, shocking my mother and the crowd.

This gets my attention, and I sit up straighter as gasps fly around the room. I can tell he's serious by his stance, and Airewn should too. The room is completely still, and not a single noise can be heard while we all wait for his response. The best part of it all is that someone finally wiped the Nix royalty's self-righteous looks off their smug faces.

Another tense second passes, and finally, Airewn responds. "I will give this to your son in a good-faith gesture, but when he returns, my daughter will get her proper engagement period." When his last word is spoken, everyone breathes a sigh of relief. It's almost comical until he continues. "And it will be in the Nix Kingdom."

Well, fuck. It's not so funny now.

I'VE JUST CLOSED my eyes for a nap when a strong scent of the southern reeds hits me. The smell is

only found in the Nix Kingdom and pungent to anyone not used to it.

My eyes fly open to find Kassia trying to slide under my kelp comforter with me. "What the fuck, Kassia!" I push her away as I swim back and away from her. "How'd you get in here?"

"Oh…" She tries to trail one of her long red fingernails across my chest, but I slap her hand away before it could make contact. She gives me a pout of her lips for show, and it makes me hate her more. I've never been the type to hit a woman, but she's pushing it. "I have my ways, you could say."

I scoff and move further away from her, swimming over to my balcony doors and opening them. "Here, see yourself out."

Her jaw drops. "All this effort and nothing." She waves her hand to indicate her body. That's when I notice that only strings of pearls cover her naked breasts.

I really just want to strangle her with them. Nothing about her gets me hard. In fact, I know a few men who'd get me there before her. Could it be her fake ass personality? Or how about the piles of men from the Siren soldier barracks I know she's fucked? Her wanting the *'Golden Crown',* as everyone calls the merging of the two kingdoms, doesn't surprise me.

It does surprise me, however, that she's even trying this when she knows how much I hate her. Right as I go to tell her as much, her blue eyes start to glow, and I roll my own eyes. "I don't see any effort." I ignore her lame attempt at trying to mind control me, although it does prove to further piss me off.

"It's all for you, Caspian." She reaches up and grabs at one of her breasts, making a show of squeezing it and moaning as she throws back her head and bites her bottom lip. She even goes as far as to try to tease her nipples with the pearls, but her desired attempt is just a sad excuse for my attention. Any other female, I would have been a goner, but Octopussy here won't cut it.

My patience snaps as she looks at me again with another glow of useless mind control and I rush her. She gasps as a look of fear crosses her face, and I continue to swim her back closer to the edge of the balcony.

"Get." I reach for her neck and squeeze hard around her gills, and to my own delight, a whimper leaves her mouth as her lips pop open and her pale flesh starts to tinge from pink to red. This isn't a sexual squeeze, quite the opposite. Sometimes I think merpeople forget I was trained from a young age alongside the guard.

"Out." I sneer in her face right as her tail starts to thrash and tears leave her eyes.

I love it. It's the first thing I've ever liked about her–her potentially dying. *Hmm.* With no other thoughts, I sling her out and over the balcony. She swims even with the edge, coughing and gripping her throat with a pure look of rage.

"Oh, and before I forget. If you even think to tell dear ole' daddy about this, I'll make sure to tell him I found out how much you liked getting choked when I caught you screwing one of the guards." I give her a smirk and a wave; right as she finds her voice to no doubt scream at me, I slam the door in her face.

Crazy bitch.

I watch the balcony doors for a bit longer to make sure she doesn't come barging back in and finally relax once I know she won't be returning.

These days it takes too long to fall asleep, and the one time I finally do find it, she shows up and ruins it. No point in resting now. I head over to my desk and concentrate on some parchments to be signed, followed by rereading orders, laws, and requests until not only can I not sleep, but I have a massive headache.

Thoughts of the shore and *her*, cross my mind. What is her name? What will it be like when I can

finally get close to her? Talk to her? Will I cave at the first interaction and feel her silken-looking skin before I can stop myself? Does she already have a mate?

I shake my head, trying to dispel the mate thoughts and reach for the papers that will change the course of my life, even just for a bit. Daryn got me enrolled and set up in something they call High School on the surface and then transcribed all the papers to our own version of coral parchment so it wouldn't deteriorate. The other Human paper he kept in a bag and hid with everything I would need when I went to the surface.

Apparently, when you're a certain age, you go to school like the commoners here do. Although, here, it is not as strict for schooling or as confusing as on the surface. Here, we school our young on tests and abilities, and when they pass, either early or late depending on strength and knowledge, they finish. I look over my schedule, and apparently, I'm in something called calculus for a set amount of time. What the hell is that?

I keep looking down the list to see I get a lunch break like a common worker, so there's that at least. The few times I've gone up to the surface with either Daryn or Kelby to practice eating their food, I couldn't hold it down.

The stuff is rancid. *Are Human dates like our dates down here?* If so, I was going to have to get real cool with that food and not puke my guts out. I grab at my hair in frustration, my headache getting worse. Daryn also made sure to get tons of Human currency, a place for me to live, and one of our staff, who is also a Kaiman, to come to the surface as my servant there.

Hopefully that's normal for Humans. Everything is covered, but is this really worth it? If I'm being honest, the only reason I want this time away from the Kingdom is for *her*. The girl with enchanting eyes that calls me to the land like one of our best Sirens.

Would it be worth getting any sort of time with her if I just have to leave? Who says she'll be interested in me? Who says she doesn't already have a mate? Does Human mating work the same?

"FUCK!" I shout aloud to no one. Parchment swirls down and around me as I fling it off the desk.

With little-to-no sleep, no answers, and a soon to be marriage to a witch, there is nothing left to do but drown myself in some kelp beer. Putting on a disguise was pointless; the first time I tried to sneak out and down to the local bars, I got caught almost immediately.

So now, fuck anyone who has a problem with it. Screw the looks of shock or awe that their prince is drinking amongst the locals. I needed time to think and time to drink. Maybe then I'd get some sleep.

Passing by Kelby's door on the way out of the castle, I knock, and I'm not surprised when he's ready to go, as he usually has a way of telling when I'm coming by. "I figured you'd be by."

"Why's that?" I ask with a scoff.

This brings out an obnoxious laugh from him that has me shaking my head. "What?"

"Oh, just the pissed off look on Kassia's face when she left your side of the Castle earlier."

Now I do laugh. "Yeah, did you see her attempt?"

"Pearls?"

I shudder. "Yeah, we might have to change our traditional royal garb. Next time I see pearls, my eyes may burn from the memory."

"*Eesh*. Yeah, she was looking rough. More desperate than usual."

We both swim out of the way of a local collector leaning against the side of the bar, barely holding his liquor. "It makes you wonder." Kelby stops talking as we enter and get seats towards the back corner.

"Wonder what?" I muse as a young siren, who looks way too young to be in a bar, serves us some

kelp beer in bottles. It breaks my heart, but not all of them can be saved. Hopefully that will change. I want better lives for our community.

He sucks the beer from the slit in the top of his bottle before answering. “What kind of shit do you think Kassia will try when you’re gone?”

I take a drink but don’t answer anymore about her.

Kassia has already taken up too much of my head space for someone I hate. He takes the hint, and we drink in silence until the bar door violently opens, making conversations cease around us. I’m surprised when I see our royal commander appear and head our way.

“Prince Caspian, you’re needed at the castle immediately.”

Skye

CHAPTER FIVE

I stare up at the imposing building, dreading stepping foot inside. *Breathe Skye, it's just high school*. I take a deep breath in and move up the stone steps as slowly as possible. The last time I was here was horrible. Pearl accosted me. Almost hurt my baby. The police were called. Not that it did much.

Her father is the sheriff, and I'm the town slut; at least that's what many are saying. Maybe I should just do online schooling again. It really wasn't that bad, and I can pick up some more shifts at Oceanic.

My heart starts to race, and I feel nauseous. I stride over to the side and plop down on the steps, looking over the ocean view across the street and take some deep breaths. One of the things I always loved about this place was the view. You would often catch me gazing out the windows, daydreaming of hitting the waves. Well, that was until the day I got shunned from this dreadful school.

"Whore! Why are you even still around? No one liked you, we only put up with you because of Brady, and now he's gone." Someone shouts from down the hall. Elliot comes up beside me and takes my hand, tugging me over to his locker.

"Hey, mama, it's okay. Please, don't cry." I wipe my hand down my face, and he's right, I am crying. Damn hormones. I never wanted them to know how hurtful what they have been saying is to me. Not that it matters much. Ever since Brady's celebration of life, things have gotten tremendously worse. I am so grateful to whoever rescued me and saved my baby's life, but I wish they could have brought me somewhere else. Being discovered by Elliot and the Sea Bitches did not help. Now, I'm not only a whore, but I'm also a suicidal freak who needs to be committed, according to Pearl.

"Don't let them get to you, Skye. Brady loved you more than he loved the sea." Elliot continues to try and cheer me up. It's pointless though. I just need to get away from the toxicity that lingers at Kelly Cove High.

"Thanks, E," I whisper softly before moving closer to my own locker. I avoid glancing at the one between mine and Elliot's. I spin the lock to the right code and take a small breath in before opening the door. Bile rises in my throat, and my face pales. I raise my hand to cover my mouth in an audible gasp. Who would do this? Snickers sound from behind me, and I know.

I slam the door shut and spin to face the evil sea bitch. "What the hell, Pearl?" I scream, pulling everyone's attention to me. She laughs, flipping her perfect hair over her shoulder before giving me an innocent pout and a shrug of her shoulders.

"It seemed fitting. After all, you did try to kill yourself and your innocent child," she sneers. A shudder runs through me, and I know these tears are permanently going to be on social media. Elliot gently moves me aside before opening my locker to see what's going on. "Wait, E, don't," I choke out, but it's too late. His face goes from concerned to horrified within seconds.

I close my eyes, hoping that makes the bloody baby doll disappear. If the 'murderer' written across its porcelain skin wasn't the worst thing, the noose of seaweed around its neck would do it. My sanity is barely hanging on these days, and this doesn't help.

A few people gasp in horror, and others start laughing, taunting me, calling me a 'baby killer,' saying an abortion would have been easier. I stand stock-still just listening, letting the tears and sobs overtake me. Someone leans closer while Elliot is trying to remove the doll.

"You should really just leave. This school, this town, this Earth. But maybe this time, wait until Brady's innocent child is born." The last thread of my sanity snaps. I don't know who pulls me off, but when I come to, I'm dripping with Pearl's blood, a chunk of her hair in my grip. I kick and fight the strong arms around me, screaming and growling.

"She's certifiable. Someone needs to lock that crazy bitch up," Pearl screams, crying. I roll my eyes but take a deep breath and calm down. She's always been so dramatic. A voice pulls me back, and I sigh into the body supporting me.

Someone shouts from the other end of the lot, tugging me from that dreadful day, and I can't help but smile.

"What are you doing here?" I ask my sister Nina. She gives me a look like I'm stupid and strides over to where I am, offering me her hand.

"Come on, Skye. You are one badass mama, and this school isn't ready for your comeback." I snort a laugh and take her hand, letting her pull me to my feet.

"You're ridiculous. I don't want a comeback. I just want to get through this year and graduate. No excitement. No drama. Just a boring senior year," I tell her in all seriousness, and she rolls her eyes.

"Sorry sis, not possible. Not only are you gorgeous, but you are one kick-ass 'Betty' on the waves. The guys are going to be all over you, and the girls will all hate you for it."

I pause at the double doors and run my hand over my messy hair, sighing. I can't believe I was once popular. Someone who loved attention and partying. Seems like a dream or a lifetime ago.

I pull open the wooden door and hold it for her. She gives me a soft shove, moving me over the threshold. My heart races, and my hands shake.

"I don't think I can do this Nina. The last time I was here..." I pause and close my eyes. A warm palm presses against mine, and she gives me a squeeze.

"I know, but I also know that emotions were high with Brady just drowning. I'm not sure about the bitches in this school, but I know the guys feel hella remorse for how they treated you," she says, then

pushes me further into the hallway.

The door slams closed behind us, making me jump and open my eyes. I expect the halls to be overflowing and all eyes on me, but they are blissfully empty. My shoulders relax in relief, and I start to walk on my own.

"Thanks Nina," I say softly, and she squeezes my palm once more, before releasing it.

"I have to get back to Oceanic. I'm technically on my fifteen minute break, but I knew I needed to be here." She gives me a kiss on the cheek, then shuffles back out into the sunshine. Leaving me with the silence and memories.

"NOW THAT WE got all the prerequisites out of the way, I would like to make one thing clear. You have always been a great student, and your father is one of my best friends, but your peculiar predicament is not the kind of impression we are looking for here at Kelly Cove High."

I keep my fake smile plastered on my face, but his words cut deep. Did he think I went out and tried to become a single mom at the young age of seventeen? Don't get me wrong, I love my son, and I don't regret for a moment keeping him, but I never planned for my life to be this way. I lean forward and grab my bag from the floor.

"Thank you, Principal Cartier. I know I'm not the prime example for your school or even this town, but I will work hard to not let my adventurous ways affect the precious students here at Kelly Cove High." I stand and stomp towards the door.

"Wait, Skye. That's not what I meant," he shouts behind me, but I keep moving. A tear slips from the corner of my eye, and I quickly wipe it away. I find the small stairs in the back and quickly jog up them.

I already know where my locker is this year, and I'm thankful it's not in the same hall that Brady's was. I don't think I could look at it every day. Way too many memories reside in these halls. I locate locker six-two-six and check the code; when it pops open, I close it and leave the building.

E has offered to watch Sebastian for a few hours, so I really need to get to the mall, but when I arrive, I instantly regret coming. I should have known it would be busy with other students. Ones I was hoping to avoid until the first day of classes. I park in the far lot and slide through the side door, avoiding the food court at all costs. I pass Surfer Chick and keep walking. I know that's where all my old friends would be shopping.

I glance at all the options and sigh, should I be shopping for comfort or style? These days I just don't care. My phone buzzes, and Elliot's face pops up on the screen in a video call request. I click accept, and Sebastian's smile greets me.

"Hi baby boy. Mommy misses you," I blurt out, and Elliot laughs.

"How did registration go?" I walk over to a small bench outside a maternity store and take a seat with a deep sigh. "That good huh?" he asks, and I nod.

"Classes are what I wanted, but according to Cartier, I have to keep my whorish ways from you innocent angels," I say with a snort as Elliot gapes at me through the camera. Sebastian babbles, and he snaps out of it.

"I don't know how to respond to that," he says finally. I shake my head and laugh.

“Not looking for a response. Don’t stress about it. One more year, then I can leave this cove of judgment far behind me.” He frowns, then masks it with a smirk. “So, how has he been for you? Did he nap? Eat?”

“Whoa, mama chill. The little guy and I have had a great time. We played some video games, scouted some hot beach babes, and splashed in the water. Oh, and yeah, we caught some Zs.” I roll my eyes and nod.

“Don’t be using my son to pick up beach bunnies, Elliot,” I scold, and he gives me a sheepish smile.

“I would never! I said we ‘scouted’; I never said we actually talked to them.”

I bite my lip to hide my smile, and he gives me that puppy dog look that always gets him out of trouble. Sebastian starts to fuss, and he bounces him on his knee.

“I’m going to feed this little man. Go do your shopping. I got this, mama.”

I thank him then end the call, glancing around at the afternoon shoppers. A few girls leave Surfer Chick, and I cringe, wishing I could run and hide. I turn my body and pretend to be doing something on my phone, but they spot me anyway.

“Please don’t tell me you’re actually thinking of shopping here?” Bonnie cackles. I straighten my spine and look her in the eyes before standing.

“I wasn’t planning on it. Hi Bonnie, Pearl, Coral,” I say, hoping that maybe they will be nice, just this once. Even though they hurt me beyond measure, I miss them some days. Coral gives me a genuine smile, but Pearl scoffs and taps her foot.

“Let’s go girls, desperation is contagious,” Pearl says before sashaying away. Bonnie gives me a once over and smiles.

“A piece of advice from an old friend, you should really be shopping for stretchy clothes. Maybe the maternity shop behind you, since, you know, it won’t be long ‘til you're knocked up again.”

I drop my mouth in shock, and she shrugs before rushing to catch up with Pearl. I blink to keep the tears from falling, and Coral comes up beside me. I wait for her parting words, but she surprises me by pulling me into a quick hug.

“Don’t let them get to you, Skye. You’re still gorgeous, and that makes them hella jealous.” She backs away and gives me a smile before following her friends towards the food court.

I wipe my cheek of the fallen tear and stomp towards Surfer Chick. I’m about to show those sea skanks how hot I can be.

After spending way more than I had planned, I walk out of Kelly Cove Outlet Mall to a bunch of messages from Arielle. She wasn’t pleased that Sebastian went to Elliot’s today, but he needs to spend time with other people than just his grandma, aunt, and me.

I know Bash is the only living piece left of Brady, but she is not the only one who misses him. Plus, I trust E with my life. I know he will always put Sebastian first in any situation. I send her a message back promising to video call before bedtime, then slip my phone in my pocket.

Walking towards my Jeep, I have to stop as a searing pain ricochets through my chest, causing me to brace myself on my knees. It feels as if someone is stabbing me repeatedly. I take a few deep breaths, then stand. I have been to three doctors, and they can’t figure out what it’s from, but it happens every now and then.

The pain this time wasn’t as intense as the first, at least. I woke up in the middle of the night screaming and drenched in sweat. Actually, that was the ER visit that discovered I was pregnant with Sebastian.

I’ll admit, I was not ready for little man to come into my life. I was a drunken, emotional wreck.

But hearing that thump thump from the ultrasound machine changed my whole world. I know he was sent to save me.

I stride slowly the rest of the way to my Jeep and climb in, waiting a few seconds for the pain to completely disappear. I feel physically drained this time, which is new. It's probably just all the stress I've been under recently.

I pull out of my parking space and head in the direction of Elliot's house. It's only been a few hours, but I could use some baby snuggles.

"THERE IS MY FAVORITE GUY," I coo, walking into Elliot's house. Sebastian is doing tummy time on the floor and gives me a beaming smile. Arms wrap around me from behind and lift me off the floor in a huge hug.

"I knew I was your favorite," E says, spinning me around into a big hug before planting a sloppy wet kiss on my neck, then blowing a raspberry. I squeal and wiggle, trying to break free.

"Eww, oh my god, Elliot, that is so gross, and I was talking to the cutest little baby on the planet." He chuckles behind me and puts my feet back to the floor before spinning me.

"Yeah sure, Lil' Mama. We both know you were talking about me."

I roll my eyes and wipe my neck off—I hate when he does shit like that—before crouching down and swooping my big guy from the blanket and covering his little cheeks in kisses.

"Mommy missed you, handsome," I whisper in his ear, and he giggles, making everything I went through today worth it. He always brings light to my dark moods. I bend over to start packing his things, but Elliot places a hand on my elbow, stopping me.

"Hey, before you rush off, want to watch a movie, or something? Hang out?" he asks me, rubbing the back of his neck nervously.

I glance over at the couch and sigh. I really shouldn't. The last time I did, I ended up falling asleep on his chest, and he cuddled me close. I'll admit it was nice, but I can't let him get the wrong idea, even if I might be attracted to him. I already depend on him too much, and Sebastian would miss him if he were to suddenly not be around anymore.

"Can I take a rain check? I am seriously wiped after all the nonsense of today," I ask with a smile. He returns it, but it doesn't reach his eyes. *Crap.*

"Yeah of course, Lil' Mama. I'll see you at school in a few days. Call me if you need anything."

I give him a grateful smile, then load up the rest of Sebastian's things and walk out to the Jeep. Elliot follows me and gives me one of his signature bear hugs after I have the baby in his seat.

"I mean it Skye, I will always be here day or night. Whenever you need me. I'm always a call away."

I nod into his chest. He places a kiss on my head then pulls away. I grant him a shaky smile, then let him hold my driver's door open as I climb in.

"Bye little man," he tells Sebastian through the open window. I watch through the baby mirror in front of his carrier as he leans in and places a small kiss on his head too. If my heart wasn't so broken, I might have thought about starting a relationship with Elliot. He's a great guy, and I know someone is going to snatch him away from us, for themselves. I hope whoever it is deserves him.

He knocks on the hood of my Jeep, then walks back inside. I glance into my mirror at a sleepy baby. *You and me both, kiddo.* "Let's get home to Aunt Nina. I bet she's missing her baby snuggles too." I pull out of the driveway and follow the ocean home.

The waves look amazing, but I am physically and mentally drained. It wouldn't be smart for me to try to conquer the tides right now.

Elliot

CHAPTER SIX

I watch as she pulls away from my house, taking a piece of me with her. I know she is still grieving, and I don't want to push her, but I wish she could see that I'm here. I've always been here. I may have been on the sidelines for most of it, just waiting for my shot, but never-the-less, I was there. Now, I know people would be upset if they found out that I had feelings for my best friend's girl, but the heart wants what it wants.

I may have kept my feelings secret in the beginning, but after a night of drunken mistakes and foolish games, not only did Brady learn about my intentions, but he revealed some secrets of his own.

I close my blinds and lay my head against the cool exterior of my living room wall, thinking back to the night I thought would change everything.

"Eli, man, what are you doing over here?" Brady stumbles over to plop beside me on the edge of the cliff and grabs the blunt from my lips, taking a drag. I watch as his eyes roll in bliss from the hit. He nudges my shoulder with his, and I fight the shivers from showing. Spending time with him lately, it's getting harder and harder for me not to just grab him and kiss his pink, pouty lips again. We never did talk about that night.

"I just needed a break. You?" I ask as he takes another hit. I reach over and snatch my blunt back before he smokes it all. He laughs and runs his fingers through his brown waves.

"Same, Pearl is becoming a nuisance. I don't know why Skye keeps her around. She's faker than the necklace around her neck."

He sighs, then lies back on the rock, looking up at the stars. "I think I want to propose to Skye the night before school starts. I even bought a ring."

He glances my way, and I fight not to show the emotions swirling through me. I take a deep breath then give him a smile.

"Wow, that's a big step," I choke out, and he tugs me down to lie beside him. I face the stars, avoiding his gaze and try to hide the fact that my heart is breaking. Not just for him, but for the girl who is on my mind the moment I wake up and the second before I fall asleep.

"Tell me… Tell me what you think I should do, E. Because I love Skye with every part of my being…but then there's you." He trails off, and my breath hitches.

I slowly turn to face him, and he has a look of severe concentration on his face. "I know I should just be happy and marry the girl of my dreams…but I'm greedy."

He leans forward and captures my lips with his, and I shudder. Pulling back for a second, he takes in my reaction before pressing his mouth harder to mine, and groans.

A noise behind us pulls him away from me, and I wait for him to realize what he just did. What he just confessed, but it never comes. He sits up and offers me a hand, giving me a huge grin. He seems happy, really happy as if this has been weighing on him for too long. I flick my blunt over the cliff, letting it fall into the waves.

"Did Skye leave?" my mom asks, coming out of the kitchen and drying her hands off. The smell of roasted potatoes and fish fill the air, and I groan. I love her fish tacos.

"You just missed her. She looked exhausted, so I don't blame her for leaving early."

I shrug, and she shuffles over to me and wraps me in her tiny arms. I have to hunch over since she's about ten inches shorter than me.

"You are being an idiot," she mumbles before pulling away and smacking me with the dish towel.

"Ow, Mom, what the hell!" I grumble, and she rolls her eyes at me, then turns back to the kitchen.

"That girl deserves to know the truth, Elliot." she says over her shoulder, and I groan, closing my eyes and smacking the back of my head against the wall. She's right, she does. We had made plans to talk to Skye that weekend, Brady and I, but it never came up since he was gone the next night.

The moment I met her and Brady, I knew that they would be a big part of my life. Brady, with his onyx locks and ocean blue eyes, and Skye, with her golden brown hair and big green eyes. Always full of wonder and mischief. They became my best friends. A breath of relief from the chaos of my life.

My dad skipped out with his physical therapist on me and my mom when I was thirteen. A twenty year old bimbo that he knocked up. One day we were living in a huge house overlooking the sea, and the next, we were out on the curb, waiting for my grandma to come rescue us. My mother fell into a deep depression, and I did everything I could to make her life easier.

I met Skye and Brady one sunny afternoon, when I was out exploring my new home. She was wearing a little blue and white tie-dye sundress with her hair in messy spirals. She was chasing Brady along the beach and threatening to feed him to the sharks.

I watched in amazement as her cheeks reddened the longer she ran. You could tell she was out of breath, but she never gave up. When she finally tackled him to the sand and cheered in victory, I knew I would marry that crazy girl some day. The smile that took over her whole face amazed me, and her laugh brought me joy. I found myself smiling again for the first time since we left Bayberry.

I slowly started to hang out with her and Brady, hoping to get closer and learn more about her. In time, I found that I not only had a crush on her but Brady as well. As we grew closer, it was harder to hide my true feelings from him.

Well, until that night we all decided to play truth or dare. Skye thought it would be hilarious if we kissed. Little did she know that would bring up feelings for each other.

I check my phone and ignore the texts from Sam and the team. They want to have lunch at Oceanic tomorrow. I should say no. I'm not happy with the way they have been treating Skye, but maybe she will be there, and we can talk.

I shuffle towards the kitchen and plop down on the stool with a groan, facing my mom. "What if I tell her, and it makes things worse? I already lost Brady. I can't lose her and Sebastian too." She sets the spatula down and brings me my plate.

"You won't know until you try, Eli. Skye deserves to know, and who knows, maybe she just might feel the same way about you. That little boy deserves to have someone in his life that loves him as much as his father would." She pats my shoulder then walks over to make herself a plate.

"I do love him. I love him as if he was my own child. Who knows, if things had worked out differently, he could have been." She shakes her head at that and laughs.

"Please do not make me a grandma. One baby is enough for the both of you."

I laugh and give her a nod, before taking a bite of my food. She may laugh at me, but I could picture my life with Skye. Getting a small place on the beach, raising Bash, having a few more.

All I ever wanted was to make her happy. If only she would let me.

Skye

We pull up in front of the small bungalow I grew up in, and my dad is sitting on the front porch swing, staring off at the waves across the street. What makes my home special is that we live at the end of a small peninsula. So our house is the only one surrounded by water on both sides.

Thankfully, it starts out shallow, and we have enough of an elevation to prevent flooding. I love my little slice of paradise. The only part of this cove I feel safe and comfortable in. I think this may be one of the only places I'll miss. Well, this and Oceanic. He climbs from the swing and stomps down the porch to help me unload.

"How was orientation?" I cringe and wrinkle my nose. "That good, huh?" I snort and shake my head. He grabs the baby seat and his bag, while I wrangle some of my shopping bags. "Did you buy the store out?" he says with a laugh, and I roll my eyes.

"I may have done a little angry shopping today," I say with a wave.

"One of these days, honey, that temper of yours will bite you in the a," he chuckles.

"Ha-ha, very funny. I appreciate the not swearing, but Dad, he's only six months old. I highly doubt he will know what 'ass' means."

I walk towards the house and a gust of wind hits my butt. I look back over my shoulder, and my dad is smirking.

"Did you seriously try to spank me?" I ask, appalled, and he just shrugs, stepping past me to bring Sebastian inside.

"You need to watch your mouth, young lady, or I'll feed you a bar of soap," he tosses over his shoulder. I laugh so hard I start to cackle. He is so full of shit.

"Thanks, Dad. I needed that laugh today," I tell him, dropping the bags on the couch and grabbing my little man from his arms.

"Love ya, kiddo," he tells me before walking back outside to sit on the swing.

He does this every night at the same time. I once asked him why, but he just smiled and stared off

at the ocean, as if in a lost memory, before muttering, "She promised to return." He never spoke of 'her' again, but I have to wonder if she was someone he once loved.

I place my sleepy baby in his Pack N Play before moving to the kitchen to make us some dinner. Smashed peas for him and a chicken salad sandwich for me. I remove his pouch from the freezer and pop it in some hot water to thaw a bit.

When Bash was first born, I was fortunate to be able to breastfeed, but since I started to get busy working at Oceanic, I couldn't keep up with the pumping. So I had to stop. Thankfully, I made him a crap ton of baby food with my supply before I dried up.

"Hey, how did the rest of the day go?" Nina asks, coming in through the back door, tossing her cheer bag on the floor. I grimace at the thought of her socializing with all those bitches, but it's something she truly loves, so I try to keep most comments to myself.

"It went. I am officially re-enrolled into Kelly Cove High. Alert the media, but please no welcome parties," I tease, and she snorts, shaking her head at me. Striding over to my sandwich, she takes a huge bite, groaning.

"I was starving, thanks, sis," she says before walking off towards her room with my dinner. "I'm jumping in the shower, then I'll help you with Bash," she shouts, not bothering to turn back around.

I should be pissed she took my meal, but she really does help me so much. I guess this one time, I can let it slide. I sigh, then grab the pouch from the hot water, giving it a good massage to break up the ice crystals.

I reheat the water and grab the Kiinde spoon attachment from the dish strainer. I seriously love these pouches; they make life so much easier. I give the peas another quick shake then move over to Sebastian.

"Is my favorite guy hungry?" I coo, placing his dinner on the couch, then bend down and scoop him into my arms, placing kisses all over his face and neck. Reveling in his giggles, I plop down on the couch and pick up the pouch.

I place him on my knee and gently squeeze a small portion on the spoon, moving it to his mouth. He opens excitedly, gazing at me with eyes that rip my heart out. He tries to take the pouch from me, and I allow him to help feed himself. He's not ready to be self-sufficient, and to be honest, I'm not ready for him to no longer need me. Even if this is such a small thing in the long run.

My dad walks inside and smiles at us. He may have been shocked and a bit disappointed learning his teenage daughter was going to be a mom, but after a lot of tears and screaming, he gave me the biggest hug, and told me I would always have him in my corner. I don't know what I would do without him.

"I remember the days I would watch your mother feed you. We didn't have those fancy contraptions, just a simple spoon. You would have a huge laugh over covering us in a mess," he trails off before staring at the ocean once more.

I smile, wishing I had such fond memories of my mom. He clears his throat, then takes the spot next to me, doing the grabby hand motions. Sebastian practically throws himself to his grandpa. I laugh and hand him over.

I watch for a moment as he continues to feed him, humming a tune I will never forget. I may not have many memories of my mother, but the melody she would sing me to sleep with will always be ingrained in my mind.

I find myself humming along, and my dad lifts his head, tears glistening in his eyes. I feel myself choking up with the immense pain gazing back at me. I need to make my exit, or I will break. I stand and move back to the kitchen, making myself another sandwich.

An hour later, after giving Sebastian his nightly bath and putting him to bed, I walk back to the kitchen. I need a snack. One of the weird things since having a baby, I find myself constantly hungry. Nina is sitting at the kitchen table, writing in her notebook. I ignore her and move to the pantry. She sighs from behind me and gets up, moving closer.

"Have you thought anymore about what to do for an extracurricular?" she asks before reaching over my head and grabbing the bag of chips I was contemplating.

"Please tell me this year you will actually get out there and try some new things? Oh, you should do drama with me," she says, and I try to hide my cringe. I don't want to become more involved in school activities. I want to leave.

I've always felt like I had a larger purpose in life than staying in Kelly Cove, and until Sebastian was born, I had plans to explore the ocean. I've always loved the water, and all the sea creatures have fascinated me since I was young.

Sebastian takes after me in that way; even at six months old, he adores being in the sea. Being a marine biologist has always been my dream and just because I now have responsibilities, doesn't mean things are going to stop… Only change.

I can't wait 'til he's older, and I can teach him to surf like my dad taught Nina and I. I caught on straight away at the age of five. You would think Nina would have as well, considering her birth mother is a professional, but actually, she prefers to stay on land.

Reading, writing in her journals, and performing in plays for the school's drama club are more her thing. She's actually really good, and I support her dreams of leaving the Cove to study acting.

I have no desire to perform for a living, but I do love to sing. That's one thing we have in common. Sometimes on weekends, we will perform at Oceanic. Nothing crazy, just a few songs for some locals and our friends who always pop in. Now that I think of it, I believe this weekend we're performing.

"I love you Nina, but I don't think drama is for me. Hey, we have a gig soon right?" She gives me a look of disappointment before nodding. I move over to the sink and grab a glass, filling it from the tap.

"Yeah, I was thinking of maybe trying out some original songs. The one you wrote, "Don't leave me," is amazing. I think you should sing it."

I drop the glass of water I was about to sip from, and it shatters all over the kitchen floor. My hands shake, and I think I may pass out.

"Skye!" Nina shouts. I glance down and stare at the bloody footprints, not comprehending they are mine. Nina grabs my hands and walks me back over to the sink. *When did I move away?* I wince and lean against the counter. She bends down and sits beside me, lifting my foot to remove some shards I must have stepped on.

"It's been over a year, Skye. I know Brady was your soulmate, but I think it's time to move on, or at least go talk to someone."

She gently wipes the bottom of my toes with a kitchen towel, then moves to the other. "It doesn't look like you need stitches, but surfing tomorrow is going to hurt like a bitch."

I sigh and gaze out the window towards the sunset over the sea. "I can't sing that song, Nina," I whisper, and she shrugs.

"Okay, it was just a suggestion."

"I know, but it's not one I can handle at the moment. Maybe someday, but for now, let's stick to cover songs," I say, still shaky. She wraps me in a hug and nods in agreement.

"Sounds good, sis." I place a kiss on her cheek, then head to the back door. She sighs behind me.

“Say hi to him for me,” she mutters before walking towards her room. I nod okay, but I know she can’t see me. Her bedroom door shuts with a soft click, and I wait a moment to see if she will come back before turning and walking out.

The warm sand brushes the cuts on my feet, but I ignore them. I need to get to the cove and talk to him. I need to yell and cry and ask him over and over again why he had to leave me. I know this isn’t a great coping method, but it helps me.

I used to come down here multiple times a day, but now I just come at night after I put Bash to bed. I have to. It’s almost an OCD tendency at this point. If I don’t, I won’t sleep a wink. I walk to the edge and let the sea wash off my feet. I take my first deep breath tonight.

The tears swell, and I don’t try to stop them from falling. I gaze out at the endless unknown before me and choke out.

“Hi Brady.”

Caspian

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sometimes life just doesn't go the way you want it to. I feel that so deep in my bones at the moment that it's crippling.

I wonder if that's why she's on the shore crying right now. It breaks every inch of me each time she wipes away another tear, and it takes all my strength not to swim up to the shore and console her.

I wonder who is responsible for making her heart break like this. And her heart *is* breaking. I can see it, even from where I hide out of sight and far away. Her eyes hold more than just tears, there's a pain there I'm not sure I'll ever understand, but I want to. I am one day away from turning eighteen and leaving to live on the land. One day away from doing what I wish I could do now.

Just one day, and soon, I will have her within reach.

Unable to handle anymore of her heartbreak, I duck back under the waves. I inhale the salty water through my gills and head back to the castle. As much as I want to be near her, it won't help the pains surging through my chest right now if she's just as upset as me.

Ever since the night when the commander showed up at the bar, I've done little else but sit by my mother's side. She fell ill, and the doctors don't seem to know what the issue is, or so they say. After much argument from my father, I finally got him to see reason and allow Uma, a Sea Witch that lives on the outer area of Kai, to come and give a diagnosis. And what she found wasn't good.

Poison.

She swears on her life it was poison, and I believe her.

It was Kassia, it had to be. I had just turned her down that night, and not shortly after, my mother passed out and has yet to awaken. Kassia took it too far this time, and as much as I need to stay, my

father still urges me to go to land. It's the last chance before I'm crowned King, and he reminds me that that's how he met my real mother. Although, that's not necessarily a good thing; look how that turned out. What would he think if I told him the last eight months, I've been obsessed with a Human girl? Would he care?

I swim in through the gates as the guards open them slowly. I needed to get to Draiton for the opening and finish out my last minute tasks. I'm assured that Kelby and Daryn will keep an eye on things with my mother, so at least that was covered. I trust those two with my life. If someone did poison her, they would find out who.

With that covered, I needed to get this shelter open. Another day those children sit in the dungeons is another day I will fail at my future job. I take another big inhale to calm my nerves as I swim up to the doors of the building, where a crowd has already formed. Off to the side is my father, ready to do the first swim through and give his blessing before we open it.

Kelby cuts me off before I can head to the podium. "Sailor's Grass," he murmurs, looking down. I follow his line of sight where 2 strands of black grass blades rest in his hand; I see that it is infecting his skin already by the way it has started to turn a slight gray.

I clench my jaw as rage fills me inside and out but make sure to turn my head slightly away from any prying eyes. This was the proof we needed, and it should make me happy that we were one step closer to the truth and a diagnosis now that we knew what caused it. I'm not though. I feel sick, pissed, and ready to swim to the wenches castle and strangle her for good this time. "Where'd you find it?"

"Under the Queen's pillow." He quickly shoves it into a tiny black bag and ties it to his waist.

"Fuck!" I cuss. "But that wouldn't cause her to pass out, though."

Kelby shakes his head before backing away right as Daryn announces to the crowd for me to speak. "I'll catch you up tonight on the way to the shore."

"Right." I correct the royal brass that covers down my chest and swim up on the platform to address the crowd. They stay silent and attentive. No doubt confused as to why the royals have opened this mysterious structure in the middle of the Kingdom. After all, my father is not known for his acts of charity.

"Kingdom of Kai. For longer than we can remember, the Orphan Laws have always been a way of life."

I pause for the gasps and shocked faces of the crowd to cover their once bored expressions. "And although those laws will still apply, for now, I hope that I, as your Prince and future King, can abolish them one day soon. To do that, we will start a new system." It seems this has turned the shocked faces to confusion and excitement.

Good. Kai will need something positive to hold onto while I'm away. Especially if word gets out about the Queen. "Welcome to Draiton." I present the gray coral and shelled building behind me. It's more than I could have hoped for.

Turning back to the crowd, I ignore my heart picking up from excitement and stay on course. "A place for orphaned children and babies of Kai to grow up in. To be nourished. Loved. Cared for."

I didn't need to sell the crowd, but in a way, I wanted to.

Change wasn't going to be easy for the Kai, and this was no exception, but if we were going to merge two enemy kingdoms together, we had to start somewhere. So the nods and smiles I was receiving was a good start, no matter how my father's down-turned lips and frowns could be seen as a stark contradiction to the happy change I was trying to make.

"Thank you."

I could say more, and maybe once I'm King, I will. For now, I let that sit, and once I am back in the water, I will implement the plans to adopt the orphans out to families. I move to the side and make way for my father, giving him a slight bow.

"Let the Blessing of this new Kai Building commence!"

I GIVE Daryn and Kelby orders to hide my whereabouts. I needed the diagnosis for my mother. Father wasn't agreeing to let the Sea Witch back in the castle since she only works in trades. When I told him what was found and that we needed to bring her back for the treatment, he just said, "The first price was steep enough. You'll learn soon enough about our past with her; never trust a Sea Witch! You must promise me you'll never visit her! Never seek her out, ever again. You must promise me." I agreed, solely because of the haunted look in his eyes, but I wasn't sure if that was from the past he spoke of, or from mom's condition.

Immediately after, he shut communications down, refusing to answer my questions and swam into his and Mom's private quarters before kicking all the servants out of that wing also.

He's been completely different since she got sick, and maybe he was just reverting back to his old ways without her to calm him, but things were getting worse. If I really did want to go to shore and discover the bond I had with the Human girl, if only for a short while, I couldn't leave things so filled with strife for my family and the Kingdoms. Of course, what will happen when they prove it was an assassination attempt from the Nix Kingdom's Princess?

As I swim closer to the sea witch's lair, it gets quieter–eerie almost.

There was a reason no one lived on the outskirts of any kingdom. We may be Merpeople, but we still suffered from the beasts of the ocean, just like the Humans did. And this area, being secluded away from others of our kind, was outright dangerous when it came to sharks and electric eels.

No sooner than the thought passed, the feel of the water displacing at my back alerts me to a predator. Turning, I raise the harpoon I made sure to bring, but along with the cold, it was darker. Darker even than our advanced eyes could take, so it was hard to see.

My heartbeat picks up on its own accord as I squint hard to try and find the cause of displacement, and that's when I hear it.

A laugh. It's faint at first, but there's no doubt it's coming from her open cave lair.

I swim closer, picking up the pace while checking behind me at what first got closer to me than it should have.

Stopping at the entrance, I peek around the corner to find her sitting upon a stool, looking into an old Human mirror. Her normal haggard appearance can be seen from where I stare at her back, showing moles and imperfections, which normal merpeople don't have. Looking up to her reflection, I see a changed appearance in the mirror.

It's so shocking I don't stop the gasp before it comes out of my mouth. She looks breathtaking and beautiful. Where she normally has little to no hair but some gray patches on her head, in the mirror, she has a full set of healthy, long black hair.

"Prince Caspian, I've been expecting you. It's so nice to see you, as always."

She cackles out a laugh while turning, and her normal ugly self appears. The one where she is so

haggard and misshapen that she is terrifying to look directly at. While normal Siren's tails are a dark blue with iridescent scales, hers is a slimy, tattered dark green, with scales that are half missing.

I swim into the dim light of her cave to make myself fully present as I raise my chin. "Uma, I wish I could say the same."

I move back as she enters my personal space with the same weird mannerisms that freaks everyone else out. It doesn't intimidate me as much as it disgusts me to have her so close. "I know what poisoned the Queen, and I've come to seek treatment."

"Ah." She smiles before turning away and swimming to her wall of vials, trailing her black pointed fingernail over the top. "So you've figured out it was the Sailor's Grass." She only turns her head slightly to show a crooked smile with missing teeth.

I clench my fist tighter around the harpoon but otherwise don't show how pissed she just made me. While she did tell us it was poison, when we asked what kind, she said she couldn't tell. My father was right not to trust her, but I'm burning with a need for revenge against that bitch Kassia, so I ignore it. "We did. It was found under her pillow. Can you treat it?"

"My dear boy, can I treat it?" she asks sarcastically.

My arm lifts before I can let her finish, and I'm rushing forward, pointing the ends of the sharp metal tips right into her overweight neck.

"I'm not going to play your games," I warn, lowering my voice and getting closer to her nasty face than I'd like. "Can you treat it or not, Witch?"

The humor dies in her eyes, but I have yet to see fear. Instead, she looks thoughtful as she frowns and takes in my appearance more, looking me up and down with only her eyes before sucking in a deep breath. "I can…"

"But?"

She looks down at the harpoon threatening to puncture her neck and gills. I take the hint and back off, lowering it slowly while making sure she doesn't reach for one of those bottles. "But it will cost you."

I don't have time for this. "Fine."

"Fine?" Her eyebrows shoot up as she swims over to a different shelf of bottles and looks intently around. "Just like that?"

"We can pay your weight in gold, just do it!"

She turns fast enough that I'm startled and thrown back when she rushes me along with two eels I hadn't seen.

"And what would I do with your gold, future King?" She doesn't wait for my response before petting one of her eels and continuing. "Gold, dear boy, will get me nothing. No, it's not gold I want but something else. *Something precious*. Have you not learned of your father's past?"

"Of course."

She huffs, calling my bluff. "And so you're willing to give up something precious?"

This doesn't feel right, and every fiber in my being is screaming to turn and swim away. "Can you heal her one hundred percent back to health, and she will not fall ill again from poison?" I ask, wanting to confirm before I fucked up.

Desperation makes men do crazy things, and I could feel the need for her to be healthy again, just like I could see the memories of her rushing into my room, shooing the servants away so she could hold me and kiss the nightmares away.

"I can."

She backs away before pulling a blue vile from the shelf to her left. "I want your call-to-mate."

I'm taken back and more than a little confused. "You want my…" I look down, not really understanding, but her laugh draws my attention.

"One day soon, dear prince, you will feel the call of a mate." My chest tightens as the Human with bright green eyes fills my mind. "*And you will do everything in your power to be near her.*" How badly have I wanted to be near her, if not just to look at her? "*Touch her.*" The witch continues, egging me on.

Could she know that I want to go to land for her? "*It will reshape your very existence. Cause you pain, chaotic thoughts, and uncontrollable rage until it's filled once you find her.*" I think back to every instance I've felt those exact things when spying on *her*.

What if she is my mate?

"I want that," Uma says simply. "From you." She opens the top of the bottle and holds the open bottle out towards me.

"So, do we have a deal?"

I turn my head and watch her pet eels hiss as they circle around me. Normally, it would cause me to back away, but I'm lost in thought.

To lose my will to mate. What if she's my mate? What if Sirens and Humans were capable in a different way, there were half-breeds after all. Even if she did have a child already, she could still be my mate, and then what would this do to us? To her? And fuck Kassia, I plan to poison that bitch just like she did my mother, right after I marry her. She'll be lucky to make it through the ceremony. But Humans can't live under water so what would I really have to lose? Mate or not, she couldn't rule the kingdom with me, so we could never be permanent anyways.

"Tick tock, dear Prince. Sailor's Grass is notorious for making the fatal blow after four days."

Regret would only be standing idly by and letting Kassia win. Letting her kill my mother to teach me a lesson. Letting her marry me and get away with all that she's done. *No more*. "Only if I can request something else as well."

"The gleam in your eyes says something utterly terrifying and absolutely bloody. My dear Prince, I do believe we have a deal."

A scream tears from me before I can stop it, and suddenly, I'm passing out.

I WAKE up not long after with Uma back in the same spot I found her; in front of her mirror where her beautiful reflection greets me. "You have the vial to cure the Queen tied to your waist." I swim up fast, shaking my head from the dizziness. "The second thing, I will deliver when the time comes."

I grip the cool blue vial in my fist, feeling scared but at the same time comforted. I give her one last look before swimming away.

"If this doesn't work, I'll come back with the royal guard." I pause, eyeing her nasty pets. "And you won't make it out alive." I turn and swim out of her cave with her evil laughter following me out.

Skye

CHAPTER EIGHT

Walking back up the beach, I feel a sense of calmness wash over me. I always do after my sessions with Brady's ghost. This may make me certifiable like everyone thinks, but it's cathartic for me.

Some days, I just reminisce; others, I scream and cry at him, letting out all my anger and stress from the day. My feet are throbbing, and I hope I didn't embed sand too deep into the cuts.

I can't believe I had such an episode over what Nina said. She's right, it's time to move on and maybe singing that song would be the key. But I wrote it right after Brady's death, and it's too dark, personal. I don't need the town making anymore comments and judgments about my life. I quietly slide open the back door, but I shouldn't have bothered.

"How'd it go?" my dad asks before taking another sip of his scotch. I shut the door, then slump against it, exhausted.

"It was good, but I am about to crash. Did Sebastian wake up at all?"

He shakes his head, then looks down at his glass. Usually if Bash doesn't wake up after we have put him down, he's out for the rest of the night. He is seriously one of the easiest babies.

"I'll need you to cover some shifts tomorrow. Arielle is working as well, so if you want to set Bash up in my office with me, I'll be there most of the day. That woman is a godsend, but a total micromanager. She is already designing you all new uniforms and has reorganized the kitchen," he says with a faint smile on his lips.

I laugh softly, keeping note not to wake my baby up. He may be a great sleeper, but if you wake him before he is ready…whew, you better be prepared. I guess he takes after me that way. I walk closer to my dad, wincing, and place a kiss on his tousled hair.

"Night, Dad," I whisper gently, before limping down the hall.

Work tomorrow is going to be a bitch. I stop outside Sebastian's room and carefully open the door. I don't think I will need him to sleep tonight, but I still need to check on him. I need to make sure he's okay before my mind can shut down for hopefully a good night's sleep.

I shuffle over to his crib, glancing down. A huge smile graces my lips, and I chuckle softly. He is passed out cold, clutching the wubbanub I got him when he was born. It's a dolphin, and the moment I saw it, I just knew I had to buy it. Even if he has never taken to a pacifier, I love that he cuddles with it. I reach down and adjust his small, thin blanket.

One of the biggest fears people have told me about is suffocation, so I did research on what is the safest blanket for a baby. He never liked to be swaddled. I run my fingers gently through his raven hair before turning and hobbling towards the door. I shut it half way and cross the hall to my room. The big bed calls to me, but the shower screams louder.

I rush through a quick wash, pulling myself from under the hot stream. I love the water. Any type. It soothes my soul in a way that makes me never want to leave it. But I climb out and towel off before throwing on one of Brady's shirts I like to sleep in. It used to be tighter, but my big belly stretched it out. It no longer smells like him, but if I close my eyes tight enough, I can imagine his salt and rain after a fresh storm scent. I lie down and cuddle a pillow to my chest, imagining it's him.

"I am so not ready for summer vacation to be over," Brady says before pulling my back to his chest, spooning and wrapping his arms tight around me. I love the mornings I get to wake up in his arms.

"It may be over, but that doesn't mean things need to change. We still get to surf in the mornings and hang out on the beach at night," I mutter, snuggling deeper into his warmth. He groans and leans over to kiss my neck.

"If you keep that up, sunshine, I won't be able to keep things PG-13."

I snort and shake my head, laughing quietly. He reaches around and grabs my breast before trailing his fingers to my hips. My pulse races as I anticipate him moving lower, but he jumper cables me instead before tickling me.

Squeals leave my mouth, and his hand quickly covers it, so we don't wake up the house. He rolls me to my back before leaning over and removing his palm, replacing it with his lips. He pulls back and stares deep into my soul.

"I love you, Skye. More than the waves. If I had to do life all over again, I would find you sooner, so I could love you longer."

I wake up with a smile on my face and my cheeks wet, blinking a few times. I lie in bed, staring at the ceiling. "I miss you, Brady," I whisper into the silence.

The clock on the nightstand flashes six am with the low beep I set for my alarm. I grab my other pillow and toss it over my face to muffle my groan. I better get up and get ready for work. I also need to pack up all of Bash's things for the day. If I don't, I'll find him playing with my dad's vape pen again. That was an argument I did not need to have in public.

I toss the blanket off and pull Brady's shirt up and over my head, laying it on my pillow. I'll just be wearing it again tonight. I pull out a pair of shorts and a tank top that says, 'Oceanic,' before choosing my favorite bikini for underneath. Maybe I can take Sebastian to the small tide pools, so he can splash around on my lunch break.

I quickly get dressed, then move to his room to pack him a bag. I leave him in his PJ's and gently wake him up. His little nose scrunches up in annoyance, but when he hears my voice, I'm greeted with the cutest, sleepy smile.

“Good morning, my sweet boy,” I coo as he blinks his eyes a few times. I can’t wait until he starts to talk. Don’t get me wrong, his babbles are adorable, but I’m dying for the day he calls me ‘mama.’ I reach down and play with his hair for a moment until he’s fully awake and wiggling around, then bend over and pick him up, giving him lots of kisses.

“Are you ready to spend the day with grandpa?” I ask him as I lie him down on his changing table and put a fresh diaper on him. My dad will get him dressed in a few hours. He may decide to curl up and take a little nap later.

I pull his little shorts back up and swoop him into my arms, heading out to the living room. My dad is up and making coffee.

“Please tell me there is a mug with my name on it?” I ask, rounding the kitchen island and placing Sebastian in his high chair.

I move over to the freezer and pull out two pouches of food. Steamed apples for breakfast and carrots for lunch. I also rush to the cabinet and grab some bottles and get them ready. I know that my dad is fully capable of feeding Bash, but I like to try and make things easy for him.

The other day, I caught him feeding him french fries, and I almost had a conniption. If it wasn’t for the huge smiles on my son’s face, I would have totally chewed his ass out. Plus, the next three diapers, I made him change.

I place all of his food, spoon attachments, bottles, and snacks in a bag, then move over to the Pack N Play, disassembling it.

“Do you need anything else?” I ask my dad, but he just shrugs.

I roll my eyes and hobble back to Bash’s room, grabbing his blanket and dolphin. I know we still have some toys at the office, and a jumperoo in the corner, so he should be all set.

“Skye, we are only going to be at work for six hours. Why are you packing as if it’s for weeks?” He chuckles as if he’s hilarious, but I roll my eyes, stuffing three more diapers into Sebastian’s backpack, ignoring him.

“Okay, little man. Let’s go,” I say, grabbing him from his chair and placing him in his baby seat. I buckle him in then turn towards my dad. He’s handing me a to-go cup, and I internally groan.

“I’ll grab this stuff and set it up while you relax for a minute and drink your coffee.”

I give him a grateful smile and take a seat on one of the chairs, sipping my first cup of the day. I glance out the window, sighing. The waves look incredible right now, but I don’t have time. Plus, my feet are killing me. Oh, that reminds me.

I stand and move to the bathroom in the hall. I rub some ointment on the larger cuts and place some band-aids over top. It’s not a permanent solution, but it will work for today. I pop a few painkillers, then grab Sebastian and my keys from the hook, and head to work.

“PLEASE, please, tell me it’s time to go home,” I groan to my dad a few hours later.

We have been swamped since the moment I flipped the switch on the open sign. Someone chuckles behind me, and I flip them off, not even looking to see who it was. I just do not care at this moment. I am way beyond tired, hungry, and my feet are killing me. He glances up from his computer at me and grimaces.

“Skye, if I wasn’t desperate for the help, I would let you leave, but I need you for a minimum of two more hours.” I groan loudly and shuffle over to the chair in front of his desk, plopping down and letting out a sigh.

“Dad, we need to get some more help here. This place is bumping from open to close lately. Not to even consider what the crowds will be like this weekend while Nina and I are playing. Did Wave ever call you back about his nephew's band? I guess they have been wanting a shot to play here.” He gives me a nod and starts to shuffle through his mess of papers.

“Yes, the Nix’s. What a funny name. They are going to be playing on Saturday night. You guys are playing tomorrow night. Nina mentioned doing some new material? I think that is a great idea.” I blanch, and my palms start to sweat, but I take some deep breaths in and try to calm myself.

Arielle enters the office with a happy Bash cuddled on her chest, stopping our conversation. He’s currently chewing on a teething ring and playing with her dark auburn curls. I go to stand, but she waves me away.

“No. No, Skye, don’t get up. I just came in here to change this little one, then I am taking him home until your shift is over.”

I raise my eyebrows at this new development, but the exhaustion takes over me, and I just shrug.

“Okay, thanks, Arielle. That would be great.”

She gives me a beaming grin and moves over to my fathers desk; she slides some of his papers aside and changes Bash. I have to bite my lip to hide my smile from the disgust showing on my dad’s face. Gah, she is a serious badass, and I love her. Brady took after her so much. He also had no fucks to give when it came to others. Damn, I miss him.

I haul myself from the chair and limp over to my sleepy baby, swooping him up into my arms for a couple of cuddles, before handing him back to his grandma and leaving the office. I walk into the kitchen and almost start to cry when I see a plate of food with my name on it.

“I seriously love you. Thank you so so much,” I choke out before stuffing my face with the fried chicken strips and sweet potato fries. Carla just gives me a smile and goes back to making some orders. I gulp down the soda someone brought to me while I was wolfing down my first meal of the day, then climb to my feet and go man the front.

I have fifteen minutes left in this shift from hell when the sea bitches stroll through the door.

“Oh, waitress,” Pearl hollers over the hustle and bustle of the restaurant, catching everyone’s attention. I place the biggest fake smile on my face and turn to her with an eyebrow raised.

“Hi, welcome to Oceanic. Would you like to dine in or outside on the patio today?” I ask, giving them my usual spiel. Someone snickers, setting off a chain of giggles, but I ignore it.

This has been my job since I was about six years old. I would stand next to the hostess stand and welcome customers. I even got some tips or candy from some of the regulars. Coral moves to the front of the group and gives me a small, secret smile.

“Inside please, if you have a table large enough. We are waiting on about five more people. Thanks, Skye.”

I give her a nod and grab some silverware and menus before walking over to the place I try to avoid. It’s the largest booth we have in this place, and it holds too many memories of Brady and me with our friends. My dad used to joke and leave a ‘Reserved’ sign on the table. Saying it was always available to us. I move to the side, allowing them to slide into the C-shaped seating.

“I will be right back with some water and sodas,” I say before rushing away.

I need a moment because I know this is going to end badly. Pearl and Bonnie have that evil glint in their eyes. Donna walks out of the kitchen, and I grab her arm, tugging her back through the doors.

"What's up, Skye? Why do you look like you're going to be sick?" she asks. I take a deep breath and give her a smile.

"Sorry. I was just wondering if you had time to assist me really quickly? A huge group just came in, and I could use some help with drinks and apps. I think I can handle the entrees." I put my hands together in a pleading position, and she laughs.

"Of course, babes. I got you, you know that." I pull her into a hug, and she pats me on the back.

It may seem stupid, but she is really saving my ass right now. We walk out to the drink station, and I fill up ten waters and a pitcher of Pepsi and Mountain Dew. I never need to ask what they want. It's always the same. The girls will only touch water, and the guys only ever want soda. When we were friends, I used to sneak them some beer, but things have changed.

I follow Donna to the table and set down their drinks in the middle. They can serve themselves. Donna places some empty cups with ice in them and turns to walk away. I touch her arm and mouth 'thank you' as she goes.

Facing the table once more, I pull out my pad and pen and get ready to deal with whatever hell they have planned for me. Elliot slides in the booth beside Sam, and my shoulders instantly relax. He shoots me a wink, then grabs a menu. I roll my eyes because he always orders the same thing, even though he will spend ten minutes looking through the options.

"Specials today are a dozen steamed baby clams in a garlic butter sauce for $13.95, sautéed scallops for $10.99, and our surf and turf for $15.99. You can get two sides with any of those as well. Do we know what we want?" I ask, trying not to tap my foot with impatience and fidget too much.

"I'll take a grilled chicken salad, dressing on the side, have to watch my weight. We can't all be lard asses like you," Pearl scoffs.

I ignore the comment and move along the table getting everyone else's orders. The girls all copied Pearl as usual, and the guys went for all the greasiest fried foods imaginable.

"Okay, great. I'll get that right in for y'all, and I will have some bread and apps out as soon as they are up," I say with another fake smile before turning and walking to the kitchen.

I move over to the order dial and clip the paper in before spinning it. We have the new POS systems, but I prefer doing it the old fashioned way. Carla always gets a kick out of it too.

I return to the dining area with their bread and apps before checking on a few of my other customers, collecting the checks, then bussing the tables.

"Order up, hon," Chef yells, and I laugh. Donna comes over and takes half, loading them on a cart, and I take the others. I push the food closer to the table, waiting for Donna to be done.

She shoots me a wink before moving over to check on her own tables. The servers at Oceanic have always been another family to me, so I don't know why we are having such trouble finding new people to help out.

I sigh and hand out the rest of the food, removing the empty plates. "I will be right back with some refills." I tell them. A loud screech stops my hasty getaway.

"What the fuck is this?!" Pearl screams at the top of her lungs. "Are you trying to kill me?" I glance down at her plate and squint in confusion.

"I don't see anything wrong here, Pearl. What seems to be the issue?" She huffs in annoyance, then throws her plate at my face, hitting me on the corner of my lip. I instantly taste blood, and I know my tooth just punctured the flesh of my mouth.

"What the hell?" I screech, wincing as blood drips down my chin. Elliot jumps up and presses some napkins to my mouth before growling something at Pearl, but I just start to laugh. I am so over this day. My dad comes out from the office, face red in anger, but I just shake my head at him. His

shoulders drop in defeat, but he still moves to the table.

"Ms. Chase, what seems to be the issue here?" he asks Pearl, glancing at all the other kids around the table. The girls, excluding Coral, look to be in glee, and the guys look guilty, avoiding eye contact.

"I'll tell you what the problem is! Her. Your daughter just tried to kill me! She needs to be locked up somewhere or arrested!!" she screams, fake tears rolling down her face. My dad looks at me with an eyebrow raised, but I just shrug. I have no clue what she's going on about. Elliot leans over Pearl's plate that has fallen all over the table, now contaminated with my blood, and studies it hard, but even he shakes his head.

"How can you not seeee! Are you all blind, or just stupid? There is dressing on my salad. She's trying to poison me!" she screams, her face turning an ugly shade of purple.

"I think it's best if you leave, Pearl. This is a family run establishment, and your theatrics are not welcome here. And don't you worry about calling your father. I will be placing a call there in the next ten minutes, letting him know about your behavior today," my dad growls quietly, and her face turns pale. He turns to face me and gently touches my cheek.

"Go put some ice on that and go home, honey. I'll grab Bash on my way to the store later," he tells me softly, giving me eyes full of pity. I nod and move away, not bothering to grab Sebastian's things from the office—I can grab them later—and walk out the front door, before hopping in my Jeep, ignoring Elliot calling my name.

I peel out of the parking lot and go home. Today has been too much. I need a drink and maybe a nap. Tomorrow is the first day of school, and if I wasn't overly dreading it before, I am now.

Elliot

CHAPTER NINE

I'm, once again, watching as Skye takes off, leaving me behind in the dust. Literally, she pulled out so fast from here she ended up kicking sand in her wake. I wait till she's no longer visible before turning and storming over towards Pearl and my friends. Bonnie is currently consoling her as she puts on a show for everyone at the table.

"What the fuck was that?" I growl, leaning down into her face.

"Whoa, man, chill out," my buddy Sam says, but I ignore him, staring the evil witch in her fake ass purple eyes. She wishes they were really purple and not the shit brown color she was born with. She blinks a few times before giving me an evil smirk.

I have never hit a chick, and I never will, but boy does she make it tempting. I step back and take a good hard look at everyone in the booth. All the people who worshiped Brady and Skye at one point just to turn their backs on her in her time of need. If it wasn't for my commitment to the swim team, I would drop them like a worm on the hook.

"You all should be ashamed of yourselves. Brady would be sick if he saw the way you've been treating Skye." I leave them with lost puppy looks on their faces and ignore Pearl and Bonnie's scoffing. I walk down the hall towards Skye's dad's office and knock.

It doesn't take him long to open his door, and I'm hit with the strong scent of weed. I can tell he's been hitting the good stuff. I haven't smoked since that night on the cliff with Brady; even if it is legal here in the cove, it's just something that we shared together.

"Eli, what can I do for you son?" he asks me with a grin, but I can tell it's not his usual happy- go-lucky one. He looks exhausted and stressed to the max. He steps aside and lets me into the room,

quickly checking the hall to see if anyone else is around, then shuts the door and strides to his chair, plopping down with a sigh.

He opens the side drawer and pulls out a bottle of scotch and two glasses. I hold my hand up in a sign of no thanks, and he shrugs, placing the glasses back in the drawer. He unscrews the cap and drinks straight from the bottle.

"I thought you were picking Bash up?" I question, and he pauses, placing the cap back on, and drops it into the drawer.

"You're right. I am. So tell me what's on your mind, Eli," he sits back and rocks in his chair, giving me a serious once over. I sit up straight and meet him eye to eye. Not hiding the chaos swirling inside me.

"There are some things I need to talk to Skye about, but I wanted to have a conversation with you first." He starts to laugh, startling me, and I stand up from the chair.

"Please don't tell me you're asking for my blessing. I love you, Eli. You and Brady were always sons to me, but trust me. Right now, Skye is hanging on by a thread." I cut him off and start to pace.

"No sir, well, at least not yet… Maybe someday though." He snorts and stands, moving over to me, placing his hand on my shoulder, stopping my feet in place.

I look to the floor and blink away the emotion from my eyes. I take a deep breath then turn to him. "I have loved your daughter for a long time…but I also loved Brady." I give him a moment for that to sink in, but he shrugs and opens the door, yelling out into the hall for Carla.

Footsteps stomp down the hall and a smack of gum snaps as Carla moves into view; her eyebrows raised and hands on her hips. "Please tell me you didn't just call for me like a dog, or even worse, your maid."

I bite my lip, but a small snort slips out. Cal rubs the back of his neck in a nervous gesture, and Carla bursts out in laughter. "I'm fucking with you, boss. What can I do for ya?" She looks at me, but I honestly don't have a clue as to why he called her. Here I am trying to confess some of my deepest sins, and he acts like nothing is wrong.

"Well, Eli here is wanting to have a heart to heart, and I can't drink, so I need carbs with a side of grease." Carla gives him a glare, and he waves her away. "Woman, do not start with me. I can have a bacon burger and onion rings every now and then. My cholesterol hasn't killed me yet."

She rolls her eyes then takes off back to the kitchen. Cal shuts the door and moves over to the couch along the back wall, he cracks open the window and plops down, lighting up again. I take the spot farthest from him and groan, rubbing a hand down my face.

"Before you go on, I want you to know that I have known for a long time about you and Skye. I will admit the Brady thing did surprise me, but it's not that much of a shock. Does Skye know?" I glance his way and shake my head. My throat feels tight, and if it wasn't from my current contact buzz, I may have had a panic attack.

"We were supposed to tell her the night after the summer party…but…" He leans over and pulls me into a quick side hug before releasing me and messing up my hair with a laugh–like he always used to.

"You, boy, are in quite a current. I'll tell you one thing, I do not want to be around when you finally have that talk with Skye. But you do need to have it and soon. I was joking earlier, Elliot. I'm not saying go and marry my daughter…but she does need someone."

Carla knocks on the door, and I hop up to open it for her. She drops two plates of juicy burgers minus the bacon and a plate of sweet potato fries. Cal goes to comment, and she shuts him up.

"You may be my boss, but that daughter of yours scares me. Now shut up and eat your turkey

burgers and fries." She stomps out of the office, muttering under her breath, then slams the door. I burst out in a laugh, and Cal rolls his eyes.

"She's right. Nina has become a bit of a micromanager lately. Whatever, sit and eat your burger, Eli." I shake my head but do as he said.

We sit and eat, and I keep waiting for the shoe to drop. It finally comes as a shoe kicking open the door and revealing a pissed off Mr. Chase, grunting like the sweaty pig he is. Cal stands and groans, "Really, Mark? It was unlocked!" he snaps, and I move to the side, cleaning up our mess.

"What is this I hear about you making a spectacle out of my sweet Pearl and kicking her out of here!" Mr. Chase gets in Cal's face, and Cal just laughs, before turning to me.

"Elliot, why don't you leave, son. And if you wouldn't mind grabbing Bash on your way home. I have a feeling I'm going to be held up for a while."

I give him a nod and slip past Pearl's dad. I toss the garbage in the can and shuffle back to the front of the restaurant. Pearl stands there by the hostess stand with her arms crossed and a smug look on her face.

"She's going to be your downfall as well, Eli. I'd watch your back if I was you." I ignore her lame attempt to set me off and shove past her. I am so over her petty bullshit. Brady was right. We should have kicked her off the island a long time ago. But my girl has too big of a heart, even if it's a little bent and broken right now.

I climb into my truck and head towards Arielle's place. I haven't been here in a few months, and I know Brady would be pissed at me for not checking in on his mom. I pull up to the blue bungalow that holds too many memories and try to fight the tears from filling my eyes.

I take a few deep breaths and wipe my face with my arm, then climb out and rush towards the door. Arielle answers before I can knock and one look at my face has her pulling me into a big hug. I take a shuddering breath in, and she murmurs something under her breath. A warm and fuzzy, calming feeling comes over me, and I pull away from her.

"Thanks, I needed that." I cough and clear my throat, looking past her to the little boy that holds my heart. I gently shove past her and crouch down to the floor. "There's my favorite little man," I coo, and he gives me a big smile with a little drool.

"I thought Cal was coming to get him," Arielle says behind me, and I climb to my feet, facing her.

"Mr. Chase popped in at the last minute to have a 'chat,' Pearl was there too, so he asked if I would take the little man home. I don't mind." She purses her lips and her eyes flash green all of a sudden. I lean in, and she blinks, then gives me a smile.

"You're such a sweet boy, Eli. Skye is lucky to have you in her corner." I shake my head and blink the fog from my brain before understanding what she said.

"Yeah…I would do anything for her," I grumble. She nods before slipping past me and grabbing Bash from the bouncy seat he's in, then placing him in the baby carrier and buckling him in tight. I move over to the couch, grab his bag and favorite blanket. She hands him to me and leans down, covering his face in kisses and making him giggle, then stands up and gives me a nod. Her eyes fill with a sheen of tears, and she clears her throat.

"Thank you, Eli. I know Brady would be so happy with how you take care of them." I lift an arm, and she gives me a quick side hug before moving past us and opening the door for me. I give her a quick kiss on the head, then take Bash to the truck. As soon as I knew Skye was pregnant, I went out and bought a bunch of baby things for my house, including a base to Bash's car seat. It makes life easier, and I was hoping to prove I was capable of being a dad someday.

I open the back driver's side door and click him in, making sure he can look into the mirror in

front of him, then place a small kiss on his head. He reaches out with his little hand and grabs my cheek, looking into my eyes with ones that haunt me. I gently pull away from him and hand him one of his teethers before shutting his door and leaning against the truck, looking up at the setting sky.

If you're looking down on us, Brady, I hope you see how much we love and miss you. Wish you were here, man.

I climb into my seat and start up the truck, turning down the volume, and I sing to the radio. It doesn't take me long to get to Skye's house, and I'm bummed to see her Jeep isn't there.

Nina meets me at the door and busts out in a giggle. "Chill, Romeo, you will see her tomorrow at school." I scowl, and she continues to laugh as she grabs Bash and his stuff before walking into the house and shutting the door. I knock my forehead against the wood and groan, ignoring her continued chuckles.

Skye

CHAPTER TEN

I get home late after raging my emotions out on the waves. The swell wasn't great, but I was able to hit a few bombs. I pull up to the house and park, trying to be as quiet as I can. I know Bash is home by now, and my dad or Nina would have put him down for the night.

I open my door and climb out, grabbing my board. Walking over to the steps, I lean it against the house; I should go put it on the rack, but I'm exhausted. Between the long hours at work, my feet being torn up and the confrontation with Pearl earlier, I'm about to pass out.

The house is dark and quiet, so I quickly check on Bash, then shuffle to my room. The moment my head hits the pillows, I'm out. My last thought being, I need to remove my shoes.

I float in the middle of the ocean, just letting the waves sweep me away. I should be scared of being all alone out here at night. But I feel peace. I have always felt safe in the water. A fin brushes my leg, and I startle, but remain floating on my back. The night sky is magical tonight. So many stars shine above me in the sky. Lightning strikes, and I sigh as the waves become rougher.

"What are you doing out here? You have a death wish, don't you?" A gruff voice says from behind me. I knew he would come. He always does.

"I've been waiting for you. Do you think maybe tonight, you will show me who you are?" I say in a teasing tone. He snorts then laughs.

"You know I can't do that," he says before swimming away. "You should swim to shore, little tsunami," he calls over his back. "There are monsters under these waves, ones that want to eat you up." I roll my eyes and swim a little closer, wading in the sea.

"Are you one of these monsters? Do you want to eat me up?" Before I can continue, he growls,

moving closer to me. His mouth touches my throat, and I whimper.

"You have no idea how much I want to eat you, little siren." I arch my neck giving him more access, and he licks me from the base to the corner of my lip. Soft scales rub along my skin, and I moan at the sensation.

"Show me." I whisper, and he groans, pushing away from me. My heart is racing, and my legs feel like jello just from that one touch. I stare into his glowing eyes. I wish I could see his face.

"You don't know what you're asking of me." I shake my head and reach a hand out to him. He hesitates before swimming closer to me. His hands find my hips, and I gasp at the hardness hitting my stomach. Is he swimming naked?

"We can't do this little siren, but soon." I wrap my arms around his neck and hold him closer. I hate this part. I hate saying goodbye. I wrap my thighs around his back, holding him tight. He groans before gripping my wet hair hard, arching my back. His mouth trails down between my bikini covered breasts.

His fingers trail from my hip up to my back, tangling into the cords of my top. He pulls the bow free, then removes the material from my body. My nipples pebble before his eyes as the cold of the ocean greets my bare flesh. Not wasting another second, he dives back down and wraps his lips around the puckered bud on my breast. This is so exhilarating. We've never gone this far in one of my dreams before.

"Please, don't stop. That feels so good." I moan into the night as I clutch his head to my body, not wanting him to end his delicious torture. I trail one of my hands down his spine, expecting to squeeze his plump ass when he trembles and pulls away. He grabs both my wrists and grips them in his palm.

"No touching, or I stop," he growls, and I immediately nod. I will do anything he says to keep him from stopping. His touch lights me up in a way I have never felt before. I'm already on the verge of riding him like one of my cut backs on my surfboard.

He moves both of my hands behind my back and secures my small wrists in one of his large palms. The move thrusts my chest out further for him to enjoy.

"Mine," he grumbles, and my pussy clenches, immediately agreeing with his possessive declaration. Soaking my bikini bottoms, even in the ocean.

"Please," I beg once more. "I need to touch you. Feel you." He pulls back, releasing me with a sigh.

"This is all I can ever offer you, little siren." He unwraps my thighs from his waist and his hard cock nudges against my core, making us groan. Why is he fighting this? Can't he tell I belong to him?

"You need to return to shore now, little siren. It's time for you to go home." With one last glance my way, he gives me a look of regret. His face still shadowed, not showing me who he is, before swimming away.

I quickly flip to my chest and try to swim after him, but he moves so fast. Always out of reach.

"Please. Just tell me who you are!" I scream at the man who haunts my dreams. The man who saved me that night. He's my savior, so why is he running from me? Something wraps around my ankle and pulls me under.

I wake up panting with the sheet tangled around me like the seaweed in my dreams. *Ah, that makes sense now*. I really need to stop watching *The Little Mermaid* with Bash so much, and that naughty book I glanced at didn't help matters, either.

I check the clock and groan. I do not want to go to school today. I wish I could continue just doing

the online classes, but I know I can't avoid my ex-friends forever. Especially after that drama Pearl performed yesterday. I tap my lip and wince. Stupid witch. At least I have Elliot. I mean, I hope I still have him in my corner. Pearl seems determined to get him in her clutches.

A knock on the door has me throwing my pillow aside and huffing. "Did you want any help with Bash this morning?" Nina asks, looking as gorgeous as ever in a pale pink sundress and her hair and makeup perfect. I give her a nod and sigh.

"That would be great. Thank you. I'm going to jump in the shower and get ready too." She nods, then turns to go wake up my little man. I throw the sheet off—it's too hot for blankets—and walk over to my closet. I had decided on a pair of ripped jean shorts and a racerback top, but now seeing what Nina is wearing, maybe I should dress it up a bit.

I choose a red paisley romper and some gold gladiator sandals, then rush through a quick shower, leaving my hair down to air dry. I don't bother with makeup since I have a feeling today may be emotional. First day of senior year. A time I thought I would be excited for and spending with my best friend, my soulmate.

I grab my tote bag and sunglasses, then open the door. Giggles greet me as I walk into the kitchen, and Nina is standing there holding back laughter, or maybe that's tears. Covered in mashed banana, her once perfect dress is now a mess.

"Sebastian, you naughty boy. What did you do to your Auntie Nina?" I gently scold, taking over for her. "I have some new sundresses in my closet if you want to go look. I think I have something close to what you're wearing," I offer her softly.

"I love you, crazy boy, but you are hell for my wardrobe," she mutters as she leaves the kitchen. It may be funny, but it is so true. She is always the one getting spit up on or food thrown at.

I finish feeding him his breakfast, then wipe him off and lift him from his high chair. Instantly, he grabs my hair and tugs it to his mouth.

"Oh, yucky," I say as I untangle his fingers from the strands. This is why I never have my hair down these days. Messy buns all the way.

Nina reappears in a sky blue sundress with white seashells. "I liked the pink, but I think this is even better. Thanks, sis," she says, moving closer and grabbing Sebastian's bag from the floor. "I love you, baby boy, but I am going to love you from afar," she says to him, blowing a kiss. I laugh and move us closer to the front door.

"Do you have everything you need for today?" I ask before putting Bash in his baby seat. We need to leave fifteen minutes early since I have to drop him by Arielle's.

"I think I have everything. If not, I'll just borrow yours," she sasses, smacking my butt as she passes and jumps into the driver's seat. The Jeep may be mine, but I don't mind sharing. Plus, this way, I can do a few minutes of meditation before we get to Hell… I mean school.

"You didn't surf this morning?" Nina questions as she takes the bridge into Kelly Cove, leaving our small piece of paradise in the rear view. I shake my head and wiggle my toes, wincing.

"My feet are still a bit torn up, so I decided to avoid it. Meg texted at a quarter to five, but I told her maybe tomorrow. I probably shouldn't have hit the waves last night. She leaves in a few days for their surfing trip, so I should probably get some time in with her before she goes."

"Makes sense. Maybe I'll catch some waves with you guys when she gets back. It's been a while. Plus, we have a gig later on, so we don't want you limping," she says with a big grin on her face. Sebastian babbles in the back, and I glance over my shoulder at him.

His ocean blue eyes sparkling with the rising sun takes my breath away some days. He is his father, through and through. I know he is going to break hearts and cause me loads of trouble. A tear

escapes my eye and runs down my cheek. I slip on my sunglasses from the top of my head and discretely wipe my moment of weakness away. I'm sick of people watching me for another meltdown as if I will shatter like the thinnest glass.

Nina pulls into the small driveway, and I hop out, grabbing my son and the diaper bag. Arielle meets me at the front door with a big smile and a hug. A wave of calm overcomes me, and I take the first deep breath of the day. Something about her hugs always help.

"Now you try and have a good day, okay. Brady would have wanted you to live life to the fullest and not let people hold you back. Stand tall, girl, and eyes up. You are a warrior. More than you know," she tells me in a soft voice. I find myself nodding, then press a kiss to Bash's head before climbing back into the Jeep with Nina. She lifts my glasses and looks me straight in the eyes.

"You ready for this sis?" she asks. I give her a quick nod, but internally I'm screaming *No*.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE she actually came."

"What a whore."

"I can't believe she wore red today."

"Wow, she got fat."

People gossip all around me, but I don't let it show how it's destroying me piece by piece inside.

"There's my Lil' Mama," Elliot shouts from the end of the hall, shoving people out of the way until he's in front of me. He swoops me into a hug, lifting my feet from the floor and giving me a little spin. A scoff behind me announces Pearl and Bonnie have arrived.

"Elliot, you should stay clear of this one. Next thing you know, we will be having your funeral, and she will be carrying your bastard."

My feet hit the floor, and I hide the wince. Both from the pain and the vile words that spewed from her mouth. A few people gasp, and I know they can't believe that someone who used to be one of my best friends would have been so cruel.

"What the fuck, Pearl!" Elliot roars in her face. She blinks as if not fazed and gives him a sultry grin before running her hand up his forearm.

"I'm only looking out for you, babe. We couldn't save Brady in time. I won't lose another friend to her womanly wiles." I snort and shake my head.

"What the fuck are you laughing at, bitch? Do you think it's funny that Brady died?" Pearl gets in my face, but I don't stand down this time. A wave of anger with a side of determination hits me, and the next thing I know, I have slapped a bitch. The smack rings around the hall, but I don't care. I have put up with her comments, abuse, and rumors for far too long.

"I have loved Brady since I was ten years old. I can't believe you are still hung up on the fact he chose me. He's gone, Pearl, and I'm bleeding every single day from the pain. The only thing that's keeping me going is my little boy. The one you call a 'bastard.' He will never be that word because his father didn't leave me. He drowned in a horrific accident that still haunts my dreams." Tears run down my face, but I don't care. Let them see a real piece of me since they seem to think they can comment on every aspect of my life.

Someone grabs my arm and gives me a little tug away from the circle of rubberneckers we've

amassed.

"Come on, sis. Let's get to class," Nina says. My shoulders slump, and I give her a tired nod and smile.

"Do you think it will ever get easier? That maybe soon I can go a whole day, without feeling my heart being shredded."

She gives me a side hug, but shakes her head. "I don't know, Skye, but I hope that it does." I sigh and let her guide me to homeroom.

Hope. What the hell is hope anymore?

"I AM SO OVER TODAY. Do we really need to perform tonight?" I ask Nina as we swing by Oceanic to set up.

Arielle has Sebastian for the night, so I don't need to worry about him for the time being. The breaks are nice, but sometimes I feel as though a piece of me is missing. I'd much rather stay in and snuggle my little guy.

"There are my girls. Are you ready for tonight? It should be a full house. A lot of buzz about you being back on the stage, Skye," my dad says, only heightening my nerves.

After Brady died, I stopped performing. The depression that overtook me didn't allow me much energy, much less the desire to leave my house. I give him a nod and take some deep breaths.

"We're finished setting up, why don't you go say goodnight to Bash. Give him a kiss for me," Nina suggests, and I make no moves to stay, hightailing it out of there as fast as I possibly can. Some baby snuggles right now sound perfect.

I jump in my Jeep and drive towards home. Arielle agreed to babysit at our place tonight so I won't have to wake Bash up and bring him home later. She has plans in the morning so an overnight was out of the question. The tears take over and I let them fall. I just need a moment. I need a second to breathe and work through this anxiety. I used to love to perform; now, I couldn't care less. But I know this is the next step of my recovery.

I pull up in front of the small bungalow and smile, I always feel peace here. The door is open, and I can hear Arielle singing to Bash. The melody runs through me, drawing me closer. I reach the door and blink. I didn't even realize I had climbed out of the Jeep, or started walking.

I shake my head. How tired am I? I just need to get this night over with and get some good sleep. I open the door and Arielle stops, giving me a big smile.

"I knew you wouldn't stay away. Now be quick, I already fed this little guppy, and he had his bath." I take him from her arms and give him a cuddle, swaying from side to side.

"I just wanted to say goodnight. I have to get back, we go on in about twenty minutes," I rasp out.

Ugh, I hope my nerves won't affect my voice tonight. I already know the sea bitches will be there. I don't need to be more social media fodder. Bash starts to squirm and rub his eyes, letting out the cutest yawn. Oh, how I wish I could just go to sleep with him. I hand him back to Arielle and shuffle towards the door.

"Have a great show, Skye. Take some deep breaths and try to have a good time. Sebastian and I are there in spirit, as I know Brady is."

She gives me one more hug, and I lean down to kiss Bash's head again. She opens the screen door for me and gives me a gentle shove. "You've got this, honey. This is the next step to healing. It's time, Skye."

I give her a nod and walk down the steps, turning at the last moment. I call out before she shuts the door, "I'll be home in a little while, and I'll see you in the morning. I love you, baby boy."

I wipe my eyes as I climb into my Jeep, then shake my messy curls out of my bun, giving it a quick finger comb, I shrug. This is as good as it's going to get. My lip is still puffy, but some concealer helped to hide the cut at least. I gently dab some red lip crap on and start the engine, heading back to Oceanic. It's showtime.

I arrive just in time to be ushered onto the stage. My sister gives me wide eyes and a beaming smile. She lives for this stuff. "Are you ready?" she mouths at me, and I shrug, causing her to laugh.

She turns and gives our drummer Ki a nod to start, and I take a deep breath before starting the bridge to a classic we all love. *Bullseye* by Aly & AJ. Some of the crowd cheers when Ric starts on his electric guitar, and I smile, letting the vibrations rush through me. Nina keeps her eyes on me, making sure I actually do have this, and I decide just to have fun. I forgot how much I missed this; just letting it all go and having a blast with my sister.

Sweat drips down my brow, but the permanent smile on my face prevents me from stopping and taking a break. We play another two songs, then slow it down. Nina starts in on *Say Something* by Christina Aguilera and A Great Big World, and I instantly know that I won't make it through this with dry eyes.

Nina gives me a small smile in encouragement, and I suck it up and start on the chorus, harmonizing with her soft tone. I glance into the crowd and ignore the sea bitches, keeping my eyes on Eli. I can tell the lyrics are affecting him too. My throat gets tight, and I look away from him, gazing towards the back door.

Ocean eyes meet mine and cause me to pause in the middle of my verse. So hypnotizing, I can't pull away. I need to be closer. I start to shuffle towards the edge of the stage, not caring if people are calling my name, or that I am about to fall from the edge.

I need to get to him. He turns his head and walks out the back door, snapping me from my trance. What the hell was that? I glance around and people are staring at me, some even recording whatever just happened.

"Wow, she really has lost her marbles," someone whispers and a few people agree.

My heart races, and my palms sweat. I need to get out of here. My eyes fill with tears as I turn and race off the stage, taking the steps two at a time, ignoring the pain in my feet. I need to get home. I need my bed. It was too soon. I should have listened to myself. I'm not ready.

One step forward, three steps back.

Caspian

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The transition to my Human form came naturally, as did walking on the two limbs that the Humans called legs. It was weird having my junk exposed compared to having it hidden, but I fit easily enough in the clothes that were left for me by the backpack, so I guess I'd be covered.

Finnley, the castle servant that would assist me on land, came ahead of time to prepare things for me; she was already up in the house awaiting my arrival.

"So, you know that big screen we watched that one time from the water, the thing called a movie?" Kelby asks, relaxing against a rock jutting out of the water. He was referring to the time we found a huge flat material hanging in the sky that showed a story. Upon Kelby getting closer, he read it was called a drive-in movie theater.

I scoff. "Yeah, what about it?"

"It wasn't called a movie, it was called *Batman,*" Daryn corrects.

"Whatever, asshole," Kelby grumbles to Daryn before turning back to me. "Anyways, you have a fucking batcave man."

I laugh and shake my head as I put the backpack on. "I guess I fucking do."

This house, along with the underwater cave entrance, had always belonged to the Siren Kingdom as a way to spy on the Humans. As technology advanced, we had to have some of our Kaiman spies frequent this place often to keep up with the activity. They were a part of the king's private council and not even I was privy to the knowledge they found out, but knew it was for our security and ensuring the Humans didn't discover our kind. Although with me soon to take over, it would have been nice to know a little more about this place.

"So, we just need a sky signal to call your ass back home when things get bad," Kelby continues the awkward talk about Batman.

I rub my hands down my face trying to wipe off the tiredness. I never knew transforming would take so much out of me, but it was like all the sleepless nights over the past few months finally slammed into me.

"You mean *if* things get bad," Daryn corrects him.

"Right. I'm going to head up. You guys know where the call is, and we've gone over how to use it. So just report in with it weekly when you come ashore." Even though I was bone tired, watching them disappear under the water and leave me in a new body and in a new place sent a strange anxiety through me that was almost exciting.

Breathing the air as deep as I could into my new restricted lungs, I was graced with another new sensation. Breathing air. I could do both before, but with my gills closed and not having water flowing freely throughout me, I felt restricted in my breathing. The smells around me were also different, harsh and everywhere.

After transforming, I made the mistake of sucking up water through my nose, which had always been natural; but immediately after, I was caught with a series of strange coughing fits and thought I was about to die before accidentally turning back into my Siren form. It took a while for me to get comfortable, and the guys stayed there, silent and supportive the whole time.

They were Kaimans as well and had already had their first transformation. It was how they were able to bring me Human food to try and show me some of the stuff they'd found. Kelby even worked part time as a Collector, though it wasn't a good reputation to have. They collected Human items to sell to those interested, and it always fascinated me. It was part of the reason why I loved going with him to explore shipwrecks. However, Humans, and Human items in general, were frowned upon, so the title of Collector was as well.

The call was a little plastic and glass device that you touched, and it would connect your voice to someone else with the same device. Apparently, it was a big thing to the land dwellers, as when watching from the water, all we can see is Humans carrying them around no matter where they went. So, it would come in handy for both fitting in and keeping up communication.

I take my time exploring the house, looking at the Human trinkets—that I had no idea what they meant or what they did—before my nerves couldn't take it anymore. I wanted to see her; at least for a moment. And despite Finnley's advice to get some rest before my first full day tomorrow, I couldn't keep still. The more time passed since I'd been on land, all my emotions for her were heightened; and I had only just arrived. Could she feel a desire for someone getting stronger now that I was on land, like I was?

I WALKED THE SHORE, careful not to touch the water just yet, as both Kelby and Daryn warned me it might trigger changing for the first day or so. It took me straight to her house, and after hopping a rickety, old white wooden fence that was supposed to separate the properties, I watched her through windows with the waves crashing behind me. Was she in there right now? I tilt my head to the side and concentrate with my new body, accessing my Siren abilities to hear better.

At first, nothing and then…

"Have a great show, Skye. Take some deep breaths and try to have a good time. Sebastian and I are there in spirit, as I know Brady is." A woman coos in a tone, reminding me of something…

"You have got this, honey. This is the next step to heal. It's time, Skye."

"I'll be home in a little while, and I'll see you in the morning. I love you, baby boy." Skye shouts.

The slam of something, I can only assume is a door, is followed by the loud roar of an engine, which I had learned in my studies, were inside of cars. Humans used them to drive around and was what Finnley had learned to operate in order to drive me places.

I shake my head from the car thoughts, rush back over the gate and back down the path I originally took, following where the light of her vehicle trailed off to. I overheard Skye say the place she was going was just down the shore, and I needed to see her.

Whatever infatuation I had with this Human was driving all my actions, and fuck, if it wasn't going to end me. After jumping several fences and using my advanced hearing some more, I run through the sand until I come upon a building teaming with Humans. By the laughter, dancing, and bottles in their hands, I could only assume it was like our bars back home. Why was she at a bar?

And then her voice hit me.

Literally.

Her words went right through my chest, piercing my heart in a way that took away all of my control. I shoved people aside, not giving a shit about following proper Human behaviors. She had to have some type of mer-power. Nix? Siren? I wasn't sure, but I don't even think I could call someone that well if I tried. She had me enchanted from the first note that graced my ears.

I continue through the crowd as her song rings louder in my ears, and then she is right in front of me.

Up high on a stage and singing out her heart. I couldn't look away, just like I couldn't slow my heart rate even if I tried. And suddenly, I was pissed.

Pissed that she had this power over me when she didn't even know I existed. Before I know it, my Siren rises up from beneath my skin. It commands her to look at me, and I couldn't do anything else but let it take over. How dare a Human slay my fucking heart like this? I don't care that my eyes probably glow slightly brighter than a normal Human body allows. I needed her to see me, if just for a second. As my power to seduce and call grew stronger, more and more females in the room side-eye me and then...she looks straight at me.

Her song stalls, and the band continues to play as she becomes ensnared in my eyes. She may not know what this is, but I could see the recognition in her eyes. Maybe it wasn't recognition per se, as much as it was her soul sensing mine.

My Siren calms, but I can't be here anymore or I'd climb the steps to that fucking stage and pull her into my arms. With her hair down in curls, her eyes bright and voice enchanting, I realize I'm not the only male looking at her, just like I notice there is no traditional Human mate mark or ring. *Fuck, I can't leave now.*

Looking around, there are way too many males to take on by myself, so I watch her lure the crowd with her songs, just in case anyone got too close to what was going to be mine. Like the guy off to the side of the stage in a black shirt. Security? I didn't fucking care. He's way too close.

My body rages with the need to kill him, I just want to scream at her to come to me, but this is not the water, and I'm not as much a Siren right now as a Human. So I will have to get her attention some other way, until then, I'll have to leave before I do something I'd regret.

At least now, she has seen the glow of my eyes, and hopefully, soon, she'll hear my voice and feel my touch enough to realize our connection. It couldn't just be me feeling this.

I refuse to accept it.

The walk back is a lot slower than the speed I used when I ran here to find her. I need to think and get my shit together. Humans don't act the way our species do when it comes to mating. Our kind acts more animalistic in our claiming; but according to Kelby and Daryn's research, Humans don't feel a pull at all, just have a strong or weak attraction. I need to tone it down as much as I can, but fuck, it if that isn't going to be hard.

After getting some surprisingly refreshing sleep in a weird platform with soft wraps the Humans call a bed, I realize I have a list of shit to do if I want to pull this off. But much to my annoyance, I have to go to this school to get my books. Everything else, including my enrollment and classes, were set up ahead of time by Daryn but apparently, the students themselves have to collect their books in person.

"Your highness, you don't want me to drive you?" Finnley asks, running around the corner, almost barreling into me. I catch her right in time and straighten her out with mild amusement. Some type of white powder covers her face in patches while she holds seaweed in one hand and some weird pile of white goo in the other. She is only ten years older than me and just about the sweetest woman you'd ever meet.

She entered as a castle worker from orphan status and is one of our best cooks. Despite her station, Kelby has the biggest hard-on for her to the point of annoyance, but I don't comment on it because I like that she's getting some positive attention. Life as a servant isn't the best. That's why I picked her to come along, because, if just for a little time in her life, I wanted her to have some freedom and nice treatment.

"Yeah, Finnley. I'm fine." I turn to leave, but my curiosity gets the better of me, and I turn back around, pointing at the weird stuff in her hand. "What are you doing?"

Her face lights up with a huge smile. "I'm cooking, Your Highness! Are you hungry?"

The seaweed looks enticing and familiar, but the goo has me holding back bile. Right as I open my mouth to turn it down, she flicks her chin and turns.

"Come on, let me show you. I call them seaweed puffs." I really need to be going, but her excitement holds me back, and I let her show me. "When I first transformed into a Human, I couldn't stand their food. So after many attempts and experiments, I came up with a menu that was suitable for our species. They still eat these foods when the King's men come here. I know you will love them!"

As soon as we step into the kitchen, I smell something that immediately makes my stomach growl. "Wow, that smells.." It's the first time ever smelling something so delicious that didn't involve me sinking my teeth into something with blood.

She grabs a tray and presents what I guess is the cooked version of the white lump that was in her hand. Humans couldn't eat raw plants and animals like we could.

"Wonderful, I know! Taste it!" She starts to hold one out before her face turns a bright red, and she looks to the floor. "Your Highness, I'm so sorry, forgive me for how I addressed you."

I just give a small laugh and grab the puff out of her hand. "Finnley, please look at me." She does, and I take a bite, the flavor immediately taking over my taste buds and senses, so much so that it takes my breath away, and it's a minute before I can answer her.

"First, holy shit, this is delicious, and I'll be pissed if I throw this up. Second, you can address me informally. In fact, I forgot to go over some things for while we're here."

"Oh, okay," she says nervously while gently setting back down the tray.

I take another bite, my hunger taking precedence over the talk. When was the last time I ate?

"Up here, it's important that my identity is never revealed; so, from now on, no more *Your Highness* talk. I also have a new name. Instead of Caspian, I'll just go by Ian."

"I can do that." Her smile returns, and it puts me at ease. I didn't mind the Your Highness stuff at home, but here, I wanted a different experience. For the next year, I am no longer a Siren Prince, just a regular Human.

I grab another puff as I make my way back to the door. "Oh, and you may have to teach me how to drive. I don't think regular Humans have someone else drive for them."

Her widened eyes and panicked look makes me laugh as I head out the door where the morning light and warm breeze flow over me in comfort. Why the hell couldn't every Mer-Person have this experience? It's freeing. With the smell of salt in the air, I set off in the direction of the school.

THE EXPERIENCE of picking up my books from the school I will be attending was less than thrilling. If the boring white halls, ear-piercing octaves of the teachers voices inside the classroom, and the over-inflated head of the principal were anything to go by, this whole school thing is going to suck major ass.

The one thing I did make sure worked out in my favor was my schedule. Convincing the young teacher's aid in the office to give me information about my Human girl was easy once I turned on my Siren abilities. I confirmed what I overheard last night, her name is Skye. Fucking Skye. *Perfect.* Alluring, and she is in so much trouble with how persuasive I will be the moment her sexy name tumbles from my lips. Before I left, I also had the girl change my schedule to match Skye's; there was no way I was letting her out of my sight.

Formal shit out of the way, I wanted to scope out the area and get an idea of where to take her on our first date, even if it was just to the house I stayed at. We would have a first date, and soon. Fuck my father's rules of no Humans at the house. How can I follow the rules if I plan to ruin her in my bed? Would she break under my touch until I licked, sucked and fucked her back to health?

Thoughts consume me, absolutely destroying my train of thought as I walk around, and before I know it, I'm amongst a crowd of Humans in some type of festival, not only that, but when did the sun go down? This girl was making me crazy.

I pull out something called a wallet and check the contents to see plastic squares which could be used as currency—I forget their name—and a thick wad of green paper that is used for the same purpose. Looking at the signs around me, I can comprehend enough to tell the paper numbers went with the cost of things so that seems simple enough.

I'm lost in thought while looking around at peddlers selling fluffy looking animals and weird Human food when I hear her voice. I spin around to see her standing towards the back of a vendor's stand. She's angry. Something that pulls rage from my inner-most soul, she's fucking crying.

"Why? Why do you feel the need to keep torturing me?" I hear Skye question.

"Oh please, Skye, the poor me bit is getting old. You know what you did, and until you admit it, we will never stop. And you're delusional if you think I will let your slut ways seduce another guy of mine."

The girl yelling at Skye could be considered pretty, if you like that drowned land animal look. From what I can see, it looks like she has purple eyes, but come on, even I can tell they're fake.

There's no way that bitch is a witch. Ha, that rhymed. All the research we have back at the castle suggests that Human witches have purple eyes, and if she truly was one, I would be able to tell. Her pale blonde hair hangs limply past her shoulders, and I seriously have to wonder how any Human male would find her attractive.

"Brady drowned, Pearl. He fucking drowned right in front of me. You don't think I fought to get to him? To save him?"

"You let him drown because you knew he was about to dump your whore ass. You always have been a possessive slut."

Before I even know what I'm doing, I'm walking, and I don't stop until I'm right behind Skye, facing the bitch that won't shut her mouth. "From my experience, it takes a slut to know one. Why are you so obsessed with the fucking word anyways?"

The Human bitch that was insulting Skye lifts an eyebrow that she apparently thinks is intimidating as she takes me in. All of me. She likes what she sees; I can smell her attraction just like I can see into her ugly ass soul and smell utter rot.

"And you are?"

"Not fucking important."

She gapes, and I take a small step forward, even though the heat from Skye's closeness fires my blood in a different way. Skye looks back, up and over her shoulder at me, giving a small gasp. I guess she remembers my eyes. Good. However, in a show of intimidation, I don't let them leave the bitch that is hurting Skye. The act makes her and her friends scoff before wandering back to the hole they crawled out from.

Skye is shaking, and I don't give it a second thought; I place my hand on her shoulder and spin her around. Just touching her would be enough to knock me over any other day, but I try to concentrate and help her the best I can. She's clearly shaken by what was said, and if I'm gathering right, a dead mate would be all the clues I needed to piece together her actions over the time since I'd discovered her. Of course, she's broken, it makes sense now, and it tears my soul in half. The world dissolves around us, and I don't give a single fuck.

"Thank you, and I'm sorry," she rasps before biting her bottom lip. A blush graces her face, and I hold in a gasp. I'm a fucking goner.

"You never have to be sorry for something out of your control, or the loss of someone you love. *Fuck. Them.*"

She huffs a half-laugh. "Well, thank you anyways." She turns her body to leave, but I keep a hold of her shoulders before making her step even closer to me.

"Don't let them talk down to you anymore. Stand up to them. Put them in their place because," I pause and look down at her long, tanned legs, taking my time at her midriff and then continue up her body to meet her eyes. "Someone like you should be talking down to them."

Her tears have stopped as her stare has darkened, and that's when I realize my body has a mind of its own, and my thumbs are lazily moving back and forth over the top of her chest. She glances down at the action before looking back into my eyes as her lips pop open.

Fuck, I wasn't even using my abilities. Her reaction tells me she feels it, too. She fucking feels the bond. Her hand lifts, coming towards my face, but the ice cream cone in her shaking palm melts and drips onto her chest. I'm staring. *Stop fucking staring*.

I am quickly losing my hold on reality and about to have my way with her. *Fuck it*. As the ice

cream rolls down the crest of her breasts, I dip my head down and lick it up, my tongue diving into the fold and tasting absolutely nothing but her delicious skin.

Lava shoots through my body in the most pleasant way, and I'm rock hard. Her gasp ends in a moan, but before I can pull her closer and meet her lips with mine, someone bumping into my back breaks my hold on her. Reality slams back in.

What the fuck did I just do?

Her ice cream cone drops to the ground, and that's the last thing I see before she turns and runs.

"This isn't over," some asshole growls at me before taking off after Skye.

Shit, I'm an idiot.

Elliot

CHAPTER TWELVE

"What a slut!" Pearl mutters under her breath, and between watching the lust in Skye's eyes over this tatted-up douchebag and hearing her insults, I am about to snap.

I spin to tell Pearl off for the third time today and freeze as this new guy leans down and licks the drips of ice cream from Skye's body. A growl bubbles from my chest at his audacity to touch something that's mine. Skye gasps and bites her lip, and I can feel my own body reacting at the heat coming from them.

Seriously, who is this fucking guy? I step forward and shove him hard, but he barely moves an inch. Skye's eyes widen, and I know she's about to have a freak out.

Her hands shake, and she drops her ice cream onto the sand before spinning to leave. Not this time. I shoulder past that guy, giving him a glare. "This isn't over," I growl before taking off after Skye.

She's unlocking her Jeep when I reach her. "Skye," I yell, and she glances at me from over her shoulder while shaking her head.

"Not right now, Elliot. I can't."

She opens the door as I slam my hand against it, stopping her from climbing in. I grasp her shoulder and spin her, pinning her against the warm metal as she gives me a wide-eyed look.

"Please, E, I can't do this right now, please just let me go," she pants as I move closer to her trembling body.

"No, you're not running from me anymore," I snap, and her lips part in a gasp.

I lean closer and breathe on her neck, leaning down to her ear. She's stiff but starts to melt as soon

as I grip her hips tighter. “First Brady, now this prick. I’m done,” I growl into her ear, not giving her a moment to reply.

I lean up and claim her mouth in the way I have been dreaming of. I release her hip and place my hand on the back of her neck, tugging her closer. She whimpers before opening for me. I finally get to taste her after all these years, and I know I’m about to embarrass myself. I pull back a little and rest my forehead on hers, catching my breath. Her chest is panting, and I have the perfect view of her breasts.

I close my eyes and will my body to calm down. A small hand presses between us and pushes me gently back. Her eyes are blown with lust, and I lean down to kiss her again, but she stops me. Her hand trembles, and her eyes fill with tears.

“Skye, wait!” I rush out, but it’s too late. She drops her keys on the ground and takes off down the beach, ignoring my frantic shouts.

I drop to the hard pavement and yell. Fuck, what did I just do? I can’t lose her or Bash. I’m such an idiot. I glance up to the night sky. *Brady, if you can hear me, please send me a fucking sign, man. I’m losing it down here without you.*

Skye

WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED? One moment, I’m fighting with the Sea Bitches, and the next, some stranger, albeit hot, is licking my chest, and then, I’m kissing my best friend. I run towards home, not bothering to wait for Elliot, ignoring him screaming my name.

My mind is a mess of confusion and guilt. How could I let him kiss me? Let alone like it? Oh my god, I’m such a traitor. He’s Brady’s best friend. Maybe I really am a slut. I should just grab Bash right now and pack up; get the fuck away from this cove. I have some money saved up. But I really wanted my diploma. It’s bad enough I’m a teenage mom; I didn't want to add high school drop-out to it.

But seriously, what the fuck just happened? After this week from hell, I’d accepted Eli’s offer to grab some ice cream. It was nice until Pearl and Bonnie started in on me. I should have just gone to the napkin stand with Eli. Even though him being around never stopped them from saying hurtful shit before. And who was that guy? Why did he stand up for me?

I reach my house and stomp up the steps. Nina is rocking Bash on the couch when I enter the living room. One look at my face, and she opens her other arm for me to cuddle. I plop down next to her and lay my head on her shoulder, then reach down and hold my son’s hand, fighting the tears.

“If it wasn’t for him, Nina, I wouldn’t still be here. Every day is a struggle, but just holding him or hearing his giggle pulls me back from the dark cloud in my mind. I don’t want to keep living like this, sis.” She pulls me closer and rocks me too, humming a tune that our dad used to sing us to sleep with.

“Someday Skye, people will see what I see, and they will be down on their knees begging for forgiveness.” I snort and wipe my eyes.

“That will be the day when you finally hit a barrel ride.” She gently shoves me, and Bash grumbles, opening his ocean blue eyes. The moment he sees me, I’m rewarded with a huge gummy smile, and I sigh.

Yeah, he is why I’m still on this Earth.

Caspian

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I got zero sleep, and the brown liquid Finnely tried to pour down my throat, claiming it would help wake me up, did nothing but upset my already stressed stomach.

My lack of sleep stemmed from knowing that what I did to Skye should have sent her into heat, but instead, sent her running. I wish I could bottle the taste of her skin; it is delicious and enticing. Now, I'm going to go insane until I get the chance to taste it again, but there was no telling when that would be.

The next time I couldn't fuck it up.

The shrill ringing of a bell sounds above me, and I grab the crap I need before slamming my locker shut. I wasn't going to carry around those bag things the others did, even if it did look convenient. I was only here to be close to her, so falling in line with the Human society standards was the least of my worries.

I keep to myself as I head to my first class, looking around in hopes of spotting her. Nothing. She hasn't shown up yet. Unless she came another way, she's not here, and I know because I've been razor sharp focused on the front doors since I arrived two hours early.

I needed the chance to apologize and try to start over. I'm sure a complete stranger driving their tongue into her cleavage wasn't a great first impression. Then again, I do remember how she moaned, so it couldn't have been all bad.

Right as I turn the corner to enter the class, my shoulder is shoved back, and I'm being slammed against a locker with a pissed off dude in my face. I immediately drop my books and push him off. He's big, and I can tell by the quick look of surprise, he didn't think I'd match his strength; but Sirens

are supernaturally stronger when compared to Humans.

He corrects himself, anger replacing the shock before getting in my face. I'm not sure what his problem is, but if this is an act to show me who's in charge, then he is already defeated.

"I don't know who you think you are, but if you get near Skye-" He pauses, looking like he's internally correcting himself. The moment Skye's name left his mouth, he had my full attention.

"What?" I ask, stepping up to him with equal height and rage. "I didn't see a ring on her finger, so last I checked, she was free to be around whoever she wanted."

He scoffs and backs up, looking around the empty hallway. "Stay away from her, or I'll make sure you do."

Once he's walking off in the opposite direction of mine and Skye's classroom, I bend down and grab my books before heading to the room, filled with barely contained anger. He must be trying to get with her.

I recognized his scent on her skin when he got close, but not in a sexual way. More like what I would catch from an acquaintance or friend. He better fucking hope that's what it was.

The moment I walk in, I recognize the girl that was fighting with Skye, sitting in the front row surrounded by more girls. I ignore the looks and feelings of lust in the air as I pass them and take my seat in the back after scanning the desks, still not seeing Skye.

What the fuck was the point of being here if she wasn't? I drop my crap with a growl, and a mousy looking girl with glasses and too small of a face gasps, her face turning bright red before she buries it in a book. I pinch my brow to hold off the headache that is forming. If she doesn't show up, I'm leaving.

AFTER THE LONGEST two class periods of my life and still no Skye, I head to an eating area where I *again* ignore the attempts of a female trying to pass me her number. I opened my locker a couple minutes ago to find a bunch of crumpled papers stuffed inside, numbers on them and the words "call me." I find it as annoying as I do hilarious because I can tell it's making the guys pissed. If she didn't show after I tried to choke down this Human garbage, I would leave.

Right when I sit down with a tray of something called hamburger and french fries, the room quiets and murmurs break out. I focus my attention to where the other students seem to be transfixed.

Kelby is walking through the cafeteria doors, bright orange hair a styled mess that makes me laugh because even outside of the water, it's still sticking up. Either way, the Human females are all over him in a flash, and although I can tell he's scanning the room for me, I also don't miss the few slips of papers he's shoving in his pocket.

A low chuckle makes its way out as I turn around to relax back against the table and watch the show. I wait for him to spot me, and when he finally does, it's even more comical trying to watch him part the sea of females around him.

"Fucking hell, man," he gasps as he sits down in exhaustion. "It's like a shark frenzy trying to get past all the hormones in this place, and we're the bait!"

"You're telling me. Makes me wonder why the Human males are letting all of them go so unsatisfied." I turn back around and pick up the hamburger, shoving it towards Kelby. "Want some?"

I laugh again at his face visibly turning green before flopping the thing back down on a plastic tray. What I wouldn't do for some alive, squirming fish right about now. Almost as if reading my thoughts, Kelby takes out his call and shows me a picture of a cooler full of live fish down in the cave entrance.

"Look, this thing has a camera that takes what's called pictures to capture moments. Let's get out of here and get real food."

As impressive as the call thing is, he's right. I'm fucking starving. I look around one more time for Skye, who clearly is a no-show, and take Kelby up on his offer.

I wasn't sure what I expected out of this Human experience, but this wasn't it. I thought being a Human would be more freeing, but so far all I've seen is people slaving away or moving about, being told what to do.

Their time seems so limited. I wasn't dumb enough to think that their society didn't have laws, jobs and other things ours did, but the times I've watched Skye and her son or friends on the beach, it seemed like there wasn't so much of this school bullshit. It was saying something if I was willing to put up with this just to be near her. I'd only been here half a day and hated it already.

"What are you doing here, anyway?" I ask Kelby as I get up to leave. I hear someone shout at me to clean up my mess and laugh, *not-likely,* before we head for the doors.

"Figured you'd need a wingman. Plus, Daryn has the underwater stuff covered. There's rumors that Kassia is trying to get permission to come up here; and if that's the case, you'll need all the backup you can get."

Just hearing her name heats my skin in anger. If she even tried to come up here, I'd bury the bitch.

"HEY, ASSHOLE!" Someone grabs my arm, attempting to spin me around, and I only turn to knock their hand off me.

It's the same guy from the hallway. Kelby turns as well, facing off with the bastard in front of us. "You just going to leave your shit for others to clean up?"

Was he fucking serious? I scoff and go to turn when he reaches out to stop me again, except this time I grab his wrist and turn and pull him towards the wall, slamming him against it.

"Fucking take your hands off me." I almost falter in my grasp when I taste a swell of lust coming from him, but don't. If he thought this bully-tactic shit I saw those girls pull on Skye would work on me, he has another thing coming.

I hear gasps break out in the room before someone claps, an adult telling us to break it up. I shove off him and scoff. "If you're so worried about it, clean it up yourself." I give him a good look, unable to hide my smirk over his red face and clenched jaw, as I open the doors. "I'm already busy cleaning up the mess you've made of Skye."

Oooohs, and people shouting, *Slam dude,* ring out around me as I continue through the doors, ignoring the teacher's call as I walk out with Kelby.

I shouldn't have used the state of Skye to make a point. It was a low blow, but he needed to hear it. He's been around her, a lot, I can tell by his scent, yet she's lost a mate and suffering depression to the point of suicide. He's obviously not the one to help her through it, or has tried and failed. It's clear she needs me.

Not some fucking asshole.

I don't even realize Kelby is talking until he shakes my arm. "Hey."

I look at him and realize I'm seconds away from going full Siren and eating one of these Humans in the middle of the hallway. "You need to calm down, and also, there's some bald fat guy down the hall that just called your name."

The growl that slips out sounds all animal without a touch of humanity, but fuck it.

"Mr. Ian Casp," the principal calls again, and this time I hear it. I turn and head his way, but not before hearing Kelby laugh at the name dilemma. Whatever. It was the best I could do when they said I needed to come up with two names.

"Come, have a seat. I was planning to grab you from your next class, but this works better," he says, sitting down behind a huge wooden desk and motioning for me to take the chair in front. I'm not used to being told what to do, but for the sake of not giving myself away, I suppress another growl and sit.

"It's come to my attention that your test scores upon transfer are not where they need to be." He shuffles some papers around, looking at them before setting them in front of me and pointing to numbers that mean nothing to me.

"In fact, you placed zero in almost every category, like you hadn't taken your transfer testing. But then you see here," he points to another number, "you did answer questions. So I guess what I'm asking is, what's going on?"

I clench my jaw as I rack my brain to think. Daryn was supposed to take care of all of this ahead of time so these inconveniences didn't come up.

"There must be some mistake, I guess."

He doesn't look convinced. "Of course. Must be, however we need these scores to come up if you're to stay here." I watch as he takes back the papers, putting them in a neat stack before sliding them into an envelope and holding them out for me to take.

"That's why I'm giving you one month to get these scores up, or unfortunately, we won't be able to keep you admitted here at our school."

I grab the envelope. One month wouldn't matter. He could give me years, I wouldn't be able to learn this Human stuff in the short amount of time I was here, nor would I bother to. School was an excuse to keep up appearances and stay closer to Skye, but I could get away with being up on land without attending.

I stand to leave, and he stops me yet again, and I manage to refrain from picking up the desk and flipping it over in his lap. "I've signed you up for the Student-2-Tutor program. Inside you'll find the name, address and number for your new tutor. I believe your first session is tonight. It goes by the tutors' availability." He looks down and starts writing something, clearly dismissing me, and I ignore his *good luck* before I slam the door shut to his office.

Kelby is leaning against the hall opposite, waiting for me with a smug look on his face while ignoring a group of overtly loud females who are vying for his attention at his side.

"Heard you need a tutor." He barely gets the words out before busting into gut wrenching laughter, drawing more eyes to us.

I grab Kelby's arm and pull him to the double doors leading to our freedom and sunshine. Skye not showing up. Douchebag trying to pick fights. And now the principal. It was too much, and I was bound to kill someone or something soon. I need time back in the water. I need a release.

"Let's go."

Elliot

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Who the hell is that? And seriously, where can I find one?" Bonnie sighs as I continue glaring at the cafeteria doors that prick just exited. I huff and pick up the wasted food, carrying it over to the table and dropping it for the guys.

"Man, bro, you got schooled by a total tool," Max laughs, shoving some fries in his mouth. I lift my brow at him, and he closes his mouth to chew, before looking down, avoiding my eyes.

Since Brady died, I have a very short fuse, and these guys know all about it.

Pearl comes storming in the cafeteria, cheeks red and fuming. I roll my eyes and take my spot next to Coral. She gives me a small smile before going back to whatever she's reading today. I pull my phone from my pocket and pull up Skye's number. I shoot her another message, not at all surprised when it shows read, but no response is sent.

"He laughed in my face. Can you believe that?" Pearl goes on about that weird ass, orange haired kid's dismissal of her, and I can't help but want to fist bump the guy. Even if he is friends with that douche.

"He must be delusional if he ignored you, P," Bonnie goes on trying to calm her down, and I've had enough. Aron eats the rest of the food and gives me a fist bump.

"Are you ready for tryouts tomorrow? I can't wait to see the newbs try to compete with us. Finally, they can be the tad-poles." I roll my eyes and sigh. Aron is the youngest on our team, and I can only imagine the hell he is going to pull on the freshies. We may have been overtly cruel to him in the beginning, but we all had to, to make our place on the team.

We are known as the Sharks for a reason. We're ruthless, undefeatable, and this is our year to win

at States. We got close last year. I lean back and close my eyes, trying to drown out the excessive noise and imagine a happier time.

"Can you believe it? States, man, we're going to States!" I give Brady a fist bump and shake my head at the news.

"It's crazy, but hell yeah, bro. We worked our asses off for this." I lean in to tell him something else, but a flash of brunette hair smacks me in the chin as Skye jumps up and wraps her amazing legs around Brady's waist, giving him a kiss that has the team catcalling and Brady's cheeks turning an adorable shade of pink. She pulls back, and he laughs. He sets her down, and she spins to face me. I give her a fake pout and frown.

"What about me?" I ask, hopeful for some kind of reaction like that, but I know until Brady and I talk, that's not possible.

She gives me a beaming grin and leans up on her toes, placing a sweet kiss to my cheek.

"Congrats, E," she whispers before spinning back to Brady. He takes her hand and shoots me a look before they walk off.

I open my eyes and look around. I need to fix this shit. If Skye doesn't return tomorrow, I am going to drag her from her room kicking and screaming. Brady would never forgive me if I let her drown in her self misery again. Once was enough.

Someone laughs, and it catches my ear. I glance up at the table next to ours. Nina is sitting there with her friends, eating her lunch and joking around. A smile graces my lips and a plan starts to form. I know what I have to do.

"NINA, HEY, WAIT A UP A SEC," I call out to Skye's sister before she enters the girls locker room. She stops and gives me a smile.

"Hey, E, what's up? I have to get to practice." I give her my best smile, hoping she will give in to my plans. I run my hand through my shaggy hair and watch as her eyes follow the movements. I know she's always had a bit of a crush on me, but it's never been her. Maybe if it was, things would be easier.

"I had an idea, and I wanted your thoughts. There is a surf competition in a few weekends, and I think it might be just what Skye needs to get out of her slump." She immediately starts to jump and clap, the cheerleader showing through.

"OMG, E, you are a genius. That is perfect, and I bet Arielle will babysit Bash so she can have a weekend free. Don't get me wrong, I love that little guy, and Skye is an amazing mom, but it's a lot of work, and I know she's overwhelmed." I nod along with her, trying to keep up with the massive amount of words bubbling from her mouth.

"Okay, so I take it you're in then?" She nods. "Killer, now I'm going to need your help to get her there." She rolls her eyes and places her hands on her hips, giving me a stern look.

"Why do I feel played right now, Elliot?" I give her an innocent look, and she fights not to smile or laugh. "Gah, you're lucky you're cute, and that I would do anything to make my sister happy… Fine, I'll try and convince her, but the first step is you apologizing for whatever went down between you two. She seems lost, and it's scaring me, E," she says in a whisper, sighing in defeat. Her bubbly

mood now diminished with worry and hurt. I move closer and pull her into my arms, rubbing her back and fighting not to think about the night we found Skye unconscious on the beach below the cliff.

She takes some shaky breaths in and out, then pulls away from me, dabbing under her eyes. She clears her throat, but won't look at me. "I really do have to get to practice, I'll see you later, E."

I grunt in acknowledgement and watch as she goes. Her shoulders, once strong, now slumped. I turn and walk in the opposite direction from her and enter the boys locker room.

"Well lookie here boys, Prince Charming has finally graced us with his presence." I roll my eyes and quickly change into my practice suit, ignoring the rest of the team. They continue to joke and laugh at my expense, but I can't shake my head of thoughts of Skye, lips blue and trembling, her large stomach taking up all my attention, as I fought to keep her alive. *Them* alive. I know now that she jumped in the water in a stupid moment of desperation, but back then I didn't. I thought she had jumped from the cliff to the rocky shore beneath.

I can see how Nina still worries; I wonder if we will ever stop fighting to keep Skye living. Figuratively and literally. She may still be here and breathing, but inside, I know she's dying every day. Waves crashed over her, pleading and trying to convince her to give in.

Fuck! I just wish I knew what to do. I blink my eyes, keeping the tears behind my lids.

"Okay, Sharks, let's hit the pools. Laps today, then tomorrow we have tryouts." Coach smacks his clipboard against the locker next to me, and I jump. He comes closer and lowers his voice.

"How you doing, kid?" I give him a look, and he sighs, nodding. "I miss him too, Eli. Brady was one in a million, and this team lost someone incredible. The duo-team may be over, but you still got this, kid. I know how much is riding on this year. Shake it off, you got this." I give him a nod and walk out to the pool.

I don't wait for the whistle; I dive into the cool water and sigh, my body relaxes and my mind clears. Coach is right. I do have a lot depending on my performance this year. Skye has plans to take off, and hell or tsunami, I will be beside her.

The whistle blows some time later, and I groan from the soreness in my arms. I've been slacking, and it shows.

"Hit the showers. Eli, three more laps." Coach barks, and I nod. I wait till the room empties and quickly do my laps. I fight the memories threatening to drown me. The time Brady and I snuck in here after hours and talked till four am. The time I caught him and Skye fooling around in the showers, and he let me watch. The way his hand always grabbed my neck when he would pull me in for a congratulatory hug. Fuck, I miss him so much.

I crash out of the water, grasping the side of the pool and gasping for breath. My lungs burn, and I don't fight the sobs that leave my chest. Letting my tears mix with the chlorine, I'll give myself this one moment of weakness, then I will suck it up and lock it away.

I climb from the pool and look at the empty stands, remembering a better time. Skye hasn't walked through those doors in a really long time, and honestly, I don't think she ever will.

I KICK some stray shells on my way to the cove. I glance at the inviting waves and fight the urge to dive in. I've always loved surfing, but lately, I haven't had much desire to. I'm hoping that taking

Skye to the upcoming competition will help cheer her up, and maybe, we can catch some waves together. It's been too long.

The waves crash along the cliffs and chills run down my spine. I keep moving to the cove and stop when someone starts laughing. I'd know that giggle anywhere. I peek around the corner, and Bash is splashing water all over Skye.

I pause and have to catch my breath. The setting sun shining onto the top of her honey brown hair looks as if she's glowing, and the smile on her face only makes her look more like some kind of siren of the sea. My feet move of their own accord, and I plop down just out of sight where they can't see me, but I can keep an eye on them.

I know what these times mean to Skye, and I won't interrupt. She spins Bash in the water and then brings him close to her chest, clutching him tight. She stares out at the sea and tears trail down her cheeks. She has never looked more beautiful. The raw emotion shining through her is real, compared to all the fake bitches in our school.

They may say hurtful things and try to tear Skye down, but it's just jealousy. Her pure soul overpowers everyone around her. I saw it from the start, Brady did too. Pearl and the other girls have always craved an ounce of that.

Some may call me an idiot and not understand how I could still be around such superficial people, but I made Brady a promise, and I plan to keep it.

Pearl and Bonnie are evil. If I believed in the supernatural, I would think they had some kind of hidden lives. Staying around them and on their good sides keeps me in on all their devious plans. Most recently, they have plans to take down a poor freshman that wore the same shirt as Bonnie on Monday.

There is just something about Skye that brings out Pearl's true crazy.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" Skye says, pulling me out of my thoughts. She's leaning over me, giving me a small smile, but it doesn't reach her eyes. She looks nervous, and I can't blame her. She has a bag on her shoulder and keeps looking off towards the direction to her house. They must have been on their way home.

I climb to my feet and take the squirming baby from her arms. He wraps his tiny arms around my neck and snuggles into my chest. I sigh as all the tension leaves my shoulders. I love this little one almost as much as I love his mommy and daddy.

"You've been avoiding me. We really need to talk, Skye." I look into her blue eyes, showing her all the love I have for her and the hurt I feel. She clears her throat before fiddling with the strings to her bikini bottoms. She won't look at me.

I step closer and place my finger below her chin, raising her eyes to mine. She gulps and licks those plump, pink lips. I fight not to lean in and claim them as mine again.

I shake my head and give her some space. Small breaths hit my chest, and I glance down to an already sleeping Bash. She follows my gaze and smiles before biting her lip and blinking tears.

"I have so many images that run through my mind of Brady doing exactly that. But I know that it will never happen, and it breaks me, E. Seeing the way you are with him and how much he loves and trusts you, *it breaks me*. I know you want more from me. I've known for a while now." She trails off, and I stop her from continuing.

"Would that really be a bad thing, Skye? I love you and this little boy more than anything. Yeah, I know I'm only eighteen and that your heart is still owned by my best friend. But couldn't we just try? I don't want to push you, Skye. I just want you to let me in and let me help you. Let me be more than a fun uncle to Bash. I lost him too, and I'm fighting to cling to anything I can."

I pause and take a breath. Am I really going to say this? Is now the right time? I glance at the sea and breathe in the salty air before looking back at her.

"I loved Brady, Skye. More than just a friend." She gasps and meets my eyes. Her brows are scrunched, but she doesn't look too surprised. "I loved you both for so many years. I can't lose you now too. Please." I choke out the last word, and she steps closer, placing a hand on my cheek, looking deep into my eyes for the truth.

"I… I saw you that night. I saw the way you looked at him. The same way I always did." She drops her hand and steps back. "I'm not ready, I know I feel things for you beyond friendship, but I don't know if I could ever truly give someone my heart again, and you deserve better than that. Plus, I think I might…"

She trails off once again, avoiding my eyes. This time I step closer and gently pull her to my chest, Bash in between us, safe. The way it should always be. I wipe a tear from her cheek and rest my forehead on hers.

Her wet hair drips on my skin and tingles run down my spine. She takes a deep breath and lifts her chin, slightly, pressing her lips to the corner of my mouth. A whimper pulls us apart, and she reaches for her son. I give him one more snuggle and kiss his head before handing him off.

"Can I text you later?" I ask, hopeful that maybe she's done shutting me out. She starts walking away, but spins at the last minute.

"Just give me time, Eli. My mind is a mess, okay? I just need some more time." Her eyes are pleading, and I nod. She turns and continues down the beach. Once again taking a piece of my heart and soul with her.

Skye

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I ’m lying in my bed again. I know I need to get up and face reality, but I’m not ready to. I have spent most of this week hiding in my room, cuddling with Bash, and watching T.V. Eli has stopped by every day trying to talk to me, but I just can’t yet. The shame and guilt I feel, eat at me. How is it that I have feelings for him and possibly that stranger? Why do I feel so connected to him?

Meg and Nina have also tried to get me out of my room, but I’m not ready yet. Every time I leave the safety of my house, something happens, or I have to deal with the Sea Bitches.

I feel bad, though, since Meg had been off surfing with some friends the last few weeks, but I have no desire, no energy.

“He is so hot,” Nina says, plopping down beside me and stealing my Twizzlers. I smack her hand from reaching for my soda, and she sighs.

“Who is hot?” I can’t help but ask. She turns my way and boops Bash’s nose, getting a small giggle from him.

“Oh sis, you have really been missing out this week. That new guy, Ian, is so fine.” I glance at my son, scrunching my brows. Does she mean the guy from the beach? Ian, that does not seem to fit him. I pictured something unique or mysterious. Nina keeps going on about him, and I can feel my heart start to race and my blood heat. What the hell, why is this bugging me?

“Enough,” I snap, instantly feeling like the biggest bitch. Nina turns and sighs, her shoulder slumping. I reach out to tap her arm, but she moves to the edge and gets off, walking to the door. She doesn’t turn around, but her parting words have me about to break.

“I love you, Skye, more than the moon and the tide. I know you’re going through something, but I

miss my best friend, my sister."

"Nina, wait." I softly call, letting the tears claim my eyes. But it's too late, she's gone. A minute later the front door slams, and my Jeep's engine starts. Sebastian coos and draws my eyes to him. He's got his toes in his mouth, and he gives me a big smile. I laugh through my sobs and scoop him up into my arms, holding him close.

"You're the only guy for me. Mommy loves you so much Sebastian Maxwell Ericson."

I rock him and cry. I cry for what could have been, for what I've lost, and for what he will never have. But mostly, I cry for Brady because he is missing out on the most amazing thing in the world. This little man in my arms.

AFTER A SHORT NAP AND A SNACK, I glance at the window. The weather is mild, and we have a few hours before the sun will set.

"Do you want to go for a swim, baby boy?" I coo to Bash after he finishes his bananas.

I know he will need to wait a bit before going into the water, but the sea is calling me something fierce today, and it's been a little while since Bash got to splash around. I never did get to take him in the tide pools the other week. Plus, it's been almost eight days since I last felt the cool brush of the water along my ankles.

I scoop him up from his high chair then bring him to my room. I grab the sunscreen and slather it on. I learned the hard way how sensitive his skin is when his little toes got sunburnt. I pull out his full body swimsuit from the hamper I never did get to wash. One more time in the sea, then I'll do laundry.

Once he's ready, I throw on a suit and grab our bag. I slip on my shoes, then slide them right back off. The sand may be a little hot to touch, but the cool water will help. Making the decision to walk along the shore, we head over to the cove where I lost the one thing that kept me sane in life.

It's sad but true. Since losing Brady, I've lost my damn mind. And I feel so guilty; Bash doesn't deserve half a mom. I need to do something. I need to get better for him. Maybe I should go talk to that lady in town. I sat in one session with her and almost smacked her. Probably doesn't help that she's related to Pearl and didn't want to listen to what I had to say. She already had her own opinions, and her mind made up about me.

Yeah, maybe I shouldn't go to her. I wonder if someone in the next town over would have some availability. I know Arielle, Nina, or Eli would watch Bash for me. I stop and look over the water.

Bash starts to wiggle, I know he sees the sea and wants to get down, but I'm not ready to let him go.

Meg comes around the cliffs and gives me a beaming smile. "Babe, it is so good to see you out of that room. Are you going to hit the waves?" I shake my head, and she laughs before smacking her head.

"I must have taken in too much sea water. I almost didn't see that little cutie in your arms." She leans down and tickles Bash. He reaches up and tugs on her long hair, making her laugh, then wince. "Damn, we need to get him on a board, he's got the grip of a surfer."

I laugh, smiling, and she gives me a wink before turning and heading to the house. She waves and yells over her shoulder. "You and me, babes. My place tonight. We need a good girl sesh." I give her

a nod, and she blows us a kiss.

I sigh and continue to the cove. At first when I would take Bash here, I brought the stroller, but the sand ruined those tires so fast. But damn, is he getting heavy. We reach the spot, and I plop down on the sand, giving my arms a rest.

I place him on my lap and reach into our bag, pulling out his puddle jumper. He gives a little squeal and wiggle when he sees it. I laugh at his excitement. I love taking him into the sea but after Brady drowned, I won't take any chances. Once he's safe, I lift him and walk out into the water.

I sit in the sea and let Bash slap the water, splashing me for a little while. The amount of joy on his little face makes leaving my cocoon of safety worth it. I know I am exposed right now, and I keep looking over my shoulder for one of the kids from school to pop up.

I try to avoid this area during the day. Even if the sun is about to set in a few hours. The beach isn't too busy, most people are probably eating supper. The cool water feels amazing on my skin, and my legs tingle. The sharp pain hits my chest, and I rub the spot. My breath starts coming out in pants, and I lift him, standing to leave the water.

I really need to figure out what the hell those pains mean. My ankles throb, and I lay down on the sand, not bothering for the towel. My back gets sandy, and I hold Bash against my chest for a moment. I breathe through the pain and wait for it to stop throbbing.

I sit back up and adjust Bash. He's tired and yawning, but I need to say something before we leave. I look out to the sea and yell at Brady for leaving me. For not being here to help me with all the things he is responsible for. But mostly, I tell him about what's been going on and how I need my best friend to be here to help me understand why my heart is trying to derail my mind.

How could I even think about moving on from him when he was my soulmate? When I start to breathe normally and my shoulders feel a little lighter, I pack up our bags and set them aside. I let Bash splash in the water some more and rinse off the sand from my skin. I lie back and get the grit from my back and hair. Bash slaps water in my face, and I sputter. He thinks it's the funniest thing, and I guess for an almost seven month old, it is.

"Alright, little man, I think it's time to go home and for mommy to apologize to Auntie Nina." He blinks back at me, and I sigh. Sometimes I really miss having a two-way conversation.

I towel us off and change him into a dry diaper and some clothes before repacking the bag and heading back to the house.

I come around the corner and stop, shocked that Elliot is here. He seems to be lost in his thoughts, staring out at the sea as if it holds all the answers. I know how that is, if only it was true.

I step closer, not wanting to startle him, but he's really zoned out. Maybe he's high…then again, I don't think I've seen him smoking since Brady died. Bash wiggles in my arms, trying to be let down so he can crawl over to Eli. I switch him to my other arm with a small grunt. Damn, he's getting heavy. I step in his line of sight and lean over slightly.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" Oh god, what if he heard me talking to Brady about him and that stranger. I look over towards home and fight not to just keep walking. I know shouting my inner thoughts and feelings to the wind and sea isn't exactly private, but still it's personal. Nina suggested keeping a journal, but I've never been someone to write about my feelings, unless they were song lyrics.

Eli gives me a smile and climbs to his feet. Bash is trying to escape my arms, and I'm about to drop him. He reaches over and takes him, and I sigh in relief. He immediately gets comfortable and gives me his happy smile.

I get lost in his eyes, eyes that will always make my heart hurt.

"You've been avoiding me. We really need to talk, Skye," Eli says, and I glance his way, wishing I hadn't; the pain and uncertainty in his eyes hit me like a wave. I know he's right, but I'm not ready to hurt him. I have had a lot of time to think lately, and I know I'm not ready to move on. I don't know if I ever will be.

I fiddle with my bathing suit, avoiding his gaze. I can feel him moving closer to me, so when the heat of his skin touches mine, it's no surprise. He gently places his finger under my chin, bringing my eyes to his. The love and pain he reflects back at me has me audibly gulping. *Wow, Skye, you act as if you have never been in close proximity to a boy.* I lick my lips and fight not to move closer to him. When he steps back giving me a moment to breathe, I have never been so grateful.

One thing I can say about Elliot, he has never tried to force anything. He's always been there for me. A small sigh has my eyes falling to his chest. Bash has wrapped himself around his neck like the cutest koala bear and fallen asleep. My heart races, and I know I'm in danger of falling in love with my best friend. He glances down at my son with so much love, I know I'm about to break.

How many nights have I spent imagining Brady holding our son just like this? I bite my lip and fight my tears. I look up into his eyes and know I'm about to make a mess of things, but I owe him my truth. That is one thing he has always given me in return.

"I have so many images that run through my mind of Brady doing exactly that." I pause and fight to get this out without breaking down. "But I know that it will never happen, and it breaks me, E. Seeing the way you are with him, and how much he loves and trusts you, *it breaks me*. I know you want more from me. I've known for a while now." I trail off, trying to figure out how to make him understand.

I'm not the one for him. He deserves more.

"Would that really be a bad thing, Skye? I love you and this little boy more than anything. Yeah, I know I'm only eighteen and that your heart is still owned by my best friend." I fight a snort. *Yeah, he's right, I will always love Brady, so why the hell does he want me? I'm toxic.*

"But couldn't we just try? I don't want to push you, Skye. I just want you to let me in, and let me help you. Let me be more than a fun uncle to Bash. I lost him too, and I'm fighting to cling to anything I can."

He pauses, and I hold my breath. He seems nervous and like he has something to get off his chest. I think I know what this is about, and I have to say I have been waiting for him to confess. He glances towards the water once more, taking in a deep breath. *It's okay, Skye, you can handle this. You've known for a while now.* I fight to remain impassive but still gasp.

"I loved Brady, Skye. As more than just a friend." I search his eyes, but I don't need to because he keeps going on with his confession. "I loved you both for so many years. I can't lose you now too. Please." He's on the verge of tears, and I can't take this anymore. I step closer, bringing his eyes to mine. I know he's telling the truth, just like I know Brady loved him too. Just like I loved him. But that was before. Things are different now.

"I… I saw you that night. I saw the way you looked at him. The same way I always did." I step back, dropping my hand. Why couldn't they just tell me before, then maybe things wouldn't have been so bad. Maybe Brady would still be here by our side. I know he wants me. He wants to be a father to Bash, and maybe that would have happened, not right away, but in the future. But now, someone else seems to be in the picture, and I am so confused.

"I'm not ready, I know I feel things for you beyond friendship, but I don't know if I could ever truly give someone my heart again, and you deserve better than that. Plus, I think I might…" I stop, holding back the words that almost slipped out. I don't even know that guy. Why the hell am I about to break this perfect guy's heart for him?

He doesn't take that for an answer, not that I was very convincing. My head and my heart seem to be in a constant battle these days. Pulling me to his chest, I let him hold me gently in his strong arms. Bash between us.

Wiping a traitorous tear from my cheek, he rests his forehead on mine. God, why does he make me feel this way? I take a deep breath and place a small kiss on his mouth. I give him an inch, waiting to see what he will do, but Bash pulls me from my moment of weakness. Cooing between us, I reach down and try to take him, but Eli just holds him tighter. As if the thought of him leaving the safety of his arms is unthinkable.

He looks down at him with so much emotion, my heart races and when he snuggles him close, kissing his head, I know I'm in trouble.

"Can I text you later?" he asks. I can see the hope on his face, and it makes me feel even more ashamed at how I have been treating one of my best friends. My throat gets choked, and I know I'm about to start crying again. I take Bash from him and start to walk home, hoping he doesn't keep pushing. His shoulders shake as I pass, and I sigh, spinning to face him again.

"Just give me time, Elliot. My mind is a mess, okay? I just need some more time." I plead, and when he nods, I finally relax again. I turn and continue home. I need my bed again. I should have never left it.

I reach the back door and rinse my feet off before sliding the glass door open. The cool air brushes my sun heated skin, and I shiver. At least I'm mostly dry now, but my shower is calling my name.

"Hey, sis, can you grab Bash please?" I call out to Nina, and she comes over, taking him from my arms as I fight to shut the door. We really need to fix this slider. I turn around to thank her and freeze.

It's not my sister who is currently holding and looking upon my child as if he's the moon and the tide, but that stranger from the beach. He meets my eyes, and the pull is so strong, I fight not to crash into him.

Nina comes around the corner with a notebook and a pen, giving me a smile.

"Hey, sorry, I had to grab something from my room. You remember Ian, right, sis?" I blink back his way and reach for Bash, but he seems reluctant to give him up…why am I not forcing the issue? He's a stranger, but what is this strange connection I feel?

Caspian

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The tutoring couldn't have worked out better if I'd tried, although it's unfair of me to put her sister through so much hell. She knows I haven't been paying attention to a single thing she's saying. As soon as I heard footsteps, I couldn't stop myself from getting up mid-lesson and heading towards the door as soon as Skye walked in. It was like being drawn towards the light at the end of the tunnel. She had her guard down and hadn't even noticed me when she handed me the baby.

It was humorous until I felt the energy of the little guy. An energy I would feel only around another supernatural presence. It makes sense since I've felt something similar around Skye that I haven't been able to place. As much as I want to believe it might be a mate bond, I think there's something more to it. The baby coos and rubs drool on me right as she reaches out to take him from me with a look of shock on her beautiful face.

"Your son?" I ask her, talking like I've lost every sense of royal education in me.

"Umm...yeah." She gives me a cautious look, but when she reaches for him again, I hand him over. She's been crying. Again. Fucking Hell, what I wouldn't do to see her smile. I know the loss of a mate is difficult, but I also see the way she looks at me. I want to be the man to turn her depression around. She gives me one last weary look before walking away.

I leave the house after I give the tutoring session a half-hearted attempt just to see if she'll come back, but when there's no sign of her, I decide I can't stay any longer. Nina tells me the study hour isn't up, but it's pointless now. So far, all my interactions with Skye have been me acting like a weird creep or her upset and crying every time I see her. This just isn't going to work. I need to figure something out. A way to get her alone or make progress with her at school. Anything. I know she feels

something for me. I can tell by the gleam in her eyes and the way her scent changes whenever I'm near. I just wish Human interactions were like Kaiman ones so we can stop denying what we both clearly want.

Which is each other.

The house is dark when I walk through the door, and my hearing picks up a hushed conversation coming from the kitchen, and the atmosphere feels… off.

"What's going on?" I don't waste time pretending to ignore that something is wrong. Tingles race down my arms, and by the feeling, I just know this is going to be bad.

Kelby stops mid-sentence and turns from his conversation with Finnely towards me. Those two are hardcore flirts, so if they have put their usual banter aside, my instincts are right. "Kassia has been reported missing."

I continue to give him a blank stare. That couldn't be it. I don't give two shits about her.

"Daryn thinks she's coming here," he finishes, and my nerves deflate a little as I walk over to sit on the stool at the bar, but only a little. Something still feels off.

"Okay, is that it?"

Awkward looks are exchanged, and I let out a defeated sigh. I knew that wasn't it. "There was an attack from unknown sources at Draiton." I stand abruptly, and he follows suit, holding out his hands. "That's not the worst of it."

I feel the anger rising with my rapid heart. An attack on children? Babies? Why?

"Half the caregivers, two babies, and seven children are reported dead." He continues as if I'm not getting physically sick; I feel dizzy.

I take a deep breath, though, and collect myself like I was trained to do before locking down my emotions. "How?"

Kelby sits down, emotion finally showing in his eyes and his voice cracking. "Shark attack. A shoal of them. Great Whites."

My head whips to the side like someone slapped me across the face. Confusion wars in my mind, unsure how this could have even happened.

"That's not possible! They can't get into the Kingdom!" I all but shout, unable to contain myself anymore, and turn around so they can't see me trying to reign in my emotions. Plus a shoal of Great White sharks that doesn't normally school, and even individuals aren't found as deep as the kingdom. All of this was wrong.

They must have been let in and somehow directed to go to that very spot. There are Kai murderers who've pulled stuff similar in the past. Way before my time, but half of them have long been dead in the dungeons. It had to have been a planned attack though. I don't want to say this kind of evil could come from that girl, but it had to be…

"Kassia was there when the attack happened. There are some witnesses that said they saw her fleeing, but with the mad rush of children getting loose, Kai swimming for their lives, and sharks everywhere, no one knows what happened to her. Only that she's missing and the kingdoms, both, are on high alert to find her. With the order, she isn't to be presumed dead. The Nix King and Queen are losing it down there. Their soldiers have taken over and have even arrested Kai for uttering the phrase "dead" along with her name. And our soldiers have been dealing with the fallout of the blood. They've been fighting creatures since the attack to ward them off."

I collapse down on my stool, barely catching myself from falling off the wobbly platform at the last second, gripping the counter hard.

Chaos.

I can't help but think this is my fault.

Numbness starts to take over my nerves as I tune out what Kelby starts to say and think. I still have no doubt in my mind this was Kassia. It had to have been why Daryn thought she was on her way here. She was most likely there because she was the one who caused the attack. It's only that no one would think that their soon-to-be Queen would commit a heinous offense to have her obsession with me filled.

The sentence for that type of crime would be immediate execution, which tells me the Nix Queen and King are playing it off like she's a victim and missing. Not even they could save her if it was found out she did this, and the Sirens they're arresting, I have no doubt, are uttering anything but the truth. They most likely saw the attack, so they know it was her.

"Kelby." He was in the middle of saying something, but I'm not sure what it was. He quiets, and I break my stare from the tile flooring to look at his grief-stricken face. "The Kai prisoners that the Nix Kingdom are taking–are they doing so with permission from my father?" I pause, but hold out a hand to stop him before he can answer. "Has anyone seen the prisoners since they've been taken?"

A look of worry now takes over the grief. "I'm not sure. I only know what Daryn came up to report while you were gone, but he couldn't stay long."

"I need to get down there." I start to stand, but he thrusts an arm out, holding me down, and Finnely gasps. Probably just because she's not used to seeing how we are together, and touching a royal in public means imprisonment. I ignore her and give Kelby a warning glare.

"I know you want to help, but there was another thing that Daryn reported."

Fuck. "What now?" I growl, unable to help it, and Kelby finally removes his hands from my shoulders.

"The Nix King and Queen have named you as a suspect. You have a Kingdom warrant out for your immediate capture." I stand, unable to sit as he continues. "You need to stay put for now. They don't know about the Kai safe house, so you'll be good here. Daryn said your father has issued extra guards for this house, and they should be arriving soon."

My heart is pounding as I try to put myself in the Nix's mindset and think about this situation as if I was one of them. If the direction of my thoughts are true then they never needed me to marry Kassia in the first place. The whole sham of a marriage between us two was just an attempt to be able to take us out from inside our own walls. This has to have been their plan all along.

"THEY FUCKING PLANNED THIS! ALL OF THEM! FUCK!" My arm sweeps across the top of the counter, taking out everything in its path, glass shattering on the floor as Finnely screams and runs back.

"It's okay, It's-"

I interrupt Kelby. "It's not fucking okay. How is my father allowing this?"

He shakes his head. "He doesn't have a choice. The Nix army was in the kingdom immediately after the attack. They had the kingdom surrounded and overrun with their soldiers."

I run a shaky hand through my hair. "And what? They think I would attack my own charity project in my kingdom and kill the girl that's supposed to broker peace?"

"They don't want to imprison you. They want you there for an immediate wedding at Kassia's return," he answers and walks over to a shaky Finnely, dismissing her. I probably should have done that already, but growing up, I've been so used to having to talk around the help knowing they can't say anything. I don't think sometimes.

"This is fucking insane." That's all I can say to him for now. My mind is foggy. I need a swim, but that apparently isn't going to happen.

“She’s not missing; they know where she is. They planned this. They have the kingdom, why not just fully attack and take over?” I ask out loud, trying to think. There is something we are missing.

“And Daryn thinks she’s on her way here. Why would she set an attack, if not for me to come to her, if she’s going to come here or play missing?”

“Unless she’s going to show up here and act like she doesn’t know what happened,” Kelby answers before lifting up a jug of water and drinking deeply. He slams it on the counter beside some spilled seaweed puffs.

We sit in silence and soak the situation in.

There’s no doubt my absence played a part in Draiton’s ruin. Not that I’m Kaiman enough to say I, myself, would have solely been able to stop a shark attack; I couldn’t have. But with thinking the Nix Kingdom did this, or Kassia herself, because I left; that makes sense.

I just don’t understand the reasoning behind causing strife as we’re going into what's supposed to be an arranged marriage for peace. More is going on, and I’m not getting the full picture. I’ve been so hyper focused on Skye that I haven’t had a single thought about back home.

“How’s my mother?” I ask, breaking the silence. Not that this chaos in our kingdom is going to help her recover in any way.

“Better. Much better, but she’s worried about you. She asked Daryn to relay something to you, but honestly, it was weird.”

I perk up. “What?”

He shakes his head and scoffs with his eyebrows raised. “I don’t know man, I barely remember it after being hit with so much information, so don’t kill me if I get it wrong. But I’m almost positive it was something along the lines of ‘Don’t trust any magic-holding Humans.’” He pauses, taking another drink before continuing as I contemplate what that means. “Weird, right?”

I don’t say much because I have felt supernatural presences lately. Something weird with Skye and for sure her child. It was like I was holding a full-blooded Siren in my arms. It was that strong. “Humans don’t have magic,” I conclude out loud.

“Yup.” He nods before looking down and kicking some glass with his toe. It’s unnatural for us to wear clothes, let alone shoes or socks, but I probably should have thought about broken glass before I destroyed half the kitchen. “Where’s the clean up shit?”

I no sooner get the words out when Finnely appears like magic. “I got it, Sire.” She pauses, her eyes going wide and her cheeks going a bright red, before bowing. “I mean, Ian.” She rushes past me with a stick thing, but I stop her, gently grabbing her shoulder.

“I’m sorry Finnely, for the mess and the scare,” I say, sincerely. *Royalty don’t explain themselves, or apologize to the servants.*

That phrase was drilled in my head from my father time and time again. Around him and in public, fine. When I’m alone, no. I don’t want to be an asshole ruler. You can still rule with a sharp tongue and an iron fist, but at the end of the day, you don’t need to turn hearts against you with cruelty. Although now I’m wondering why my father never performed many charity acts in the kingdom before now. Maybe kindness came back to bite you in the tail?

“How was the school shit?” Kelby asks before I can leave the room.

“Fucking stupid.” I may have had a different answer if my limited time with Skye had been better. Or more. Or fucking anything else but awkwardness. It was like I was drowning on land around her.

I leave the room and head down to the underground cavern. I needed a swim even if I did have to stay in the safety of this area, like a fish trapped in a Human bowl. That’s exactly what I was, *trapped*.

Trapped by Skye.
Trapped by the Nix.
And apparently trapped by my doomed future.

Skye

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"We shouldn't be here," I giggle quietly as Brady pushes the gym doors open to the pool. It's past two am, and when Brady suggested we go swimming, I thought he meant in the sea, not the high school pool.

He pushes me against the cool tile of the wall and kisses me hard. I moan into his mouth and grip his hair, pulling him closer to me. I love kissing him. The way he makes my heart race, palms sweat, and thighs clench. I don't think I will ever grow tired of it. He pulls back and kisses the tip of my nose, giving me a wink.

"Come on, you're wearing too many clothes for swimming." He laughs and rips his tank top off over his head, chucking it to the bleachers before dropping his swim trunks.

Oh… he means that kind of swimming. I watch his tight, toned ass walk over to the edge of the pool before doing a perfect dive into the water. He surfaces a moment later and gives me a look.

I smile and pull my sundress from over my head. I had chosen my favorite bikini, and I know from the way his eyes heat he approves, but when I pull the string behind my neck and the one on my side, letting the pink material fall to the tile, I know that he wouldn't have cared what color I had chosen after all. This was his plan all along. I walk over to the stairs and step in slowly, letting his eyes trail my body as I go.

"If you get me in trouble, sir, we are going to have a problem." His nostrils flare when I call him sir, and I bite my lip, hiding my smile.

I have always loved riling him up. Even when we were kids, I would push his buttons.

He swims closer and grabs me, pulling my mouth to his.

"Don't start something you can't finish, Skye," he growls against my lips, and I open for him, licking into his mouth with a sigh. I wrap my arm around his neck and pull him closer to me. Skin to skin, the way it should be. His fingers trail up the backs of my legs to my thighs. I jump as he catches me.

A noise sounds behind me, but I'm so lost in this kiss I don't care. He pulls away for a second so we can catch our breath. His eyes land on something over my shoulder. "Trust me," he whispers. I pause, then nod.

"Always," I say, and it's the truth; I will always trust Brady.

"Elliot, come join us," Brady commands, and my body freezes. What? I glance at his sea-blue eyes and look for any hesitation, but he just smiles and kisses me again. Groaning into his mouth, I don't let my apprehension show when I feel another set of hands on my body.

Warm lips trail my neck, and I shiver. Brady shifts me closer, grinding his hard dick along my stomach. Eli grips my hips and lifts me so I can wrap my thighs around Brady's waist.

"Do you know how beautiful you are?" Brady mumbles, pulling back from me. "How much you make me crave you? How I would do anything for you?" I push back, letting my weight fall onto Eli's chest and gaze into the eyes of the boy I love more than the world. I give him a small nod and fight the tears that want to fall. "I love you and always will, Skye." My legs slip from his waist as he pushes away from us. He looks at Eli. "Take care of her, E, and my son. Keep them safe and know that I love you all with every part of me." I reach forward for him to not leave, but my fingers touch air. He's fading away.

"Brady, come back," I shout, but strong arms hold me close.

"Shh, I have you. I'll always have you, Skye," Eli whispers into my ear, his hot breath hitting the side of my throat. I lean back and arch my neck giving him access.

This is wrong. Where did Brady go? Doesn't he know I need him?

Eli spins me around so I'm facing him and grabs my cheeks, bringing my eyes to meet his.

"You're mine now, and I will never let you go." He leans down and kisses me, making me gasp.

A splash sounds before Eli lets me go, moving away from me. He shoots me a wink, and I furrow my brows. "That said, I am willing to share."

I snort, thinking he's joking, when a thick, hard dick presses into my ass, bringing my arousal back to the present, and I squirm. Lips trail down my neck, and I whimper when teeth brush my earlobe.

"You're mine too, Skye," a deep voice growls, making goosebumps appear on my flesh. Eli swims closer to us and places himself in front of me. He reaches out and grips my breast before leaning down and taking a hard peak into his hot mouth. The sensation runs through me, and I bite my lip, fighting the moan that wants to escape. A hand wraps around my throat from behind and…

I WAKE up panting and so turned on that I'm tempted to touch myself for the first time in forever. That dream felt so real. Every touch, kiss… I haven't had such a graphic dream since being pregnant.

I lie in bed a few more minutes, letting my breathing return to normal. Nina says something in the hall, and Bash's giggle replies. I smile and think about how he was curled up with Eli yesterday. He really does love him, and I know Eli loves him in return. Am I being selfish, keeping them apart? Should I just give in to my heart and ignore my head?

"I'm going to give the little man a bath, it seems he decided to have a blowout as soon as I picked

him up." My sister grumbles from outside my door, and I bite my lip to hide my laugh. "I know you're laughing at me, Skye. Just wait until I have a baby and all it does is pee, poop and vomit on you." I go to reply, but my father yelling from the kitchen really has me laughing.

"Don't even think about it, young lady. I'm still too young to be a grandfather." I roll my eyes. It's true he is, and I never envisioned being a teen mom myself, but if something were to happen, he would love and care for that little one just like he has Bash.

I grab my phone and send Eli a quick text asking him to meet me before school. We need to have a talk, and I think I want him to come to Bash's doctor appointment with me today. I hate doctors, and the last time we went, they ran all sorts of tests on my baby, and he just cried and cried.

The sound of his little heart breaking from the pain broke me. Nina or my dad usually comes with me, but if I'm serious about opening up to other people, then I think it might be a good idea to include him.

I quickly shower and throw on a new outfit I got at Surfer Chick. Even before having Bash, I wouldn't have worn something so girly, but I said I was going to prove those girls wrong, and I meant it.

I walk into the kitchen to hear Nina and Meg gossiping all about the new guy. A sharp whistle hits my ears, and I know I'm going to blush.

"Damn, mama, look at you. I guess the girls are coming out to play today," Meg jokes, and I laugh.

"Well if it isn't the Sleeping Beauty herself," Nina says, giving me a smile. I move closer and pull Meg into a quick hug, then slide past her and kiss Bash's little head. He's in his highchair eating some puffs. I glance at my sister and raise my brow. She keeps bustling around the kitchen, ignoring my looks. Finally she stops and throws her arms in the air.

"I know, sis, don't give me that look. But puffs don't make a huge mess." I snort and bite my lip. She must have not noticed the mushed cereal treat stuck to her back. I give her a nod and open my arms for a hug. As she sighs and wraps me in her arms, I carefully reach down and remove the mushed puff before she notices. Meg snorts, and I bite my lip.

I glance down at the floral pink and light green sundress. "Does this look okay? I'm still on the fence about it. I may or may not have done some angry shopping, and now, I'm regretting half of my purchases." Meg pops up and starts making me a smoothie.

I lean against the counter waiting for someone to say something. Nina looks out the door then gets her sly grin on her face and says, "Well ya know, I could always take away the problem outfits for you. I mean if that would help you sleep better at night."

Meg passes me my drink, and I almost choke on the first sip when she says, "I've been through Skye's closet, there is definitely an outfit in there to catch a certain new guy's eyes."

A sad sigh escapes her lips, "I don't think he likes me."

Yeah, because he's mine!

Wait, where the hell did that come from? Ian isn't anything to me. I barely know the guy.

A growl builds in my chest, and I don't understand what is going on right now. I need to get out of here!

"My closet is yours, sis. I better get Bash to his grandma's." I drop the glass in the sink and scoop up my little tadpole before hauling ass out the door. I get halfway to the Jeep, realizing I never put shoes on.

I'M LATE. Shit! I race down the hall, praying I won't get sent to the office. Since missing so many days this week, the teachers are already watching me like a hawk. I turn the corner, slamming into a hard body. "Ow," I moan, rubbing my nose. A deep chuckle brings my eyes up to a smirking Ian.

"If you wanted my attention, you could have just sexted me on my call." I blink up at him a moment, trying to understand what he's talking about. How hard did I hit my face?

"Your what?" I ask with a nervous giggle. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his phone, wiggling it in my face, and my giggles turn to full blown laughs. I wipe my eyes from the tears and shake my head at him.

"Do you mean your phone?" I ask incredulously. What did he call it? His call? He is seriously so weird, but I can admit it holds a hint of charm. He's unlike anyone I have ever met.

"It's nice to see you smile and to hear your laugh." I look up at his ocean-blue eyes, stunned that he's so close to me all of a sudden and that he'd say something so sweet. He has always seemed to be a little assholish. I give him a shaky smile in return, and he steps closer.

"You have a sadness in your eyes, it… it overwhelms me. I just want to make it disappear." I hold my breath and wait for him to continue, but he shakes his head and steps back.

"I assume you rushing meant you were late for something?" I freeze before smacking my forehead. Shit, he's right, I got off track. If the counselor didn't want to have a 'Is Skye suicidal today chat' I would already be in Math.

"Yes, I'm so late. I have to get to class." I back away and try to move past him when he grabs my arm. Tingles shoot up my spine, and I gasp at the intense sensation. Ian's eyes darken, but he clears his throat and releases me.

"I'm in your class, I'll come too." He nods before turning and walking off.

We reach the class with only fifteen minutes left in the period. The teacher, Ms. Scuttle gives us a disapproving look – she could be a seagull with that beak she calls a nose – and some of the girls giggle, immediately gossiping about Ian and me. Eli frowns, glancing back and forth between us, and Nina looks hurt.

Seriously, is it a crime now to just show up with someone? I can't wait for all these new rumors to start.

The bell rings, and Eli comes over to my desk, offering me his hand. I take it and let him guide me from my chair and to the lunchroom. He focuses on our walk and doesn't say a word to me. Is he mad at me?

We enter the cafeteria, and Eli makes a beeline for Ian. He's sitting with some people from the swim team, and I'm confused. Is he on the team now too? Did he take Brady's spot? What did I miss when I was out?

We reach the table, and Sam stands to fistbump Elliot, but he ignores him, giving Ian a death glare.

"What do you want with my girl?" Eli growls, and I freeze. *Who the hell does he think he is?*

I scoff and let go of his hand with a groan, then rub my forehead. What is with these guys and their alphahole tendencies? It's hot in books and sometimes in real life, but really, it can be exhausting.

"Eli, I'm not your girl! We've talked about this," I tell him in an angry whisper.

People are already staring, and I don't need this attention. Not now. I just returned to this hell.

Pearl comes around the table and plops down on Ian's lap, giving me a smirk. I roll my eyes and laugh as Ian drops her to the floor. She gives me a glare, promising me pain and suffering. I shiver, and Eli moves closer to me.

Ian stands up and presses between us, puffing out his chest and getting in Eli's face, snapping, "If she's your girl, then you obviously don't treat her well." I gasp at that and tug on Ian's shirt, pulling him back, but it's too late.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Eli growls, getting his face all up into Ian's. I pause for a moment, getting lost in a hot fantasy, almost missing his next words.

"If Skye was my girl, she would never cry. Obviously, you don't feel the same way since she is always sad. Never smiling or laughing. She deserves better, a real man." Eli laughs abruptly before swinging his fist and punching Ian in the right cheek, hard.

I barely manage to step back before Ian steps forward and headbutts Eli, splitting his lip wide open. The crowd quiets for a breath before roaring and chanting as they watch the blood drip down his chin. Eli gives him a chilling smile and licks his lips before flinging himself at Ian.

I cringe and look to the other guys at the table for help, but they are too engrossed in what's happening. I have never been into MMA, but watching Ian, how controlled his hits are and the way he demands his body to dodge punches, I think I may have a new favorite sport. I really need to break this up.

I bite my lip and watch as these two guys go at each other. *No, bad Skye! This is not the time to be thinking about your dream.* I put two fingers in my mouth and whistle loudly. They freeze, and I sigh.

Principal Cartier comes storming into the room, takes one look at the scene then turns and leaves, but not before giving me a look as if this is all my fault. I groan and rub my forehead with my hand. *Why did I decide to come back to this cesspit?* Ian moves closer, but I hold up my hand stopping him.

"This is why I could never be with either of you. You're acting like spoiled children fighting over a toy that doesn't even belong to you," I snap, then shake my head and turn to walk out of the cafeteria. Ian makes another comment about Eli deserving it, and I have had enough. I spin back around and look him in the eye.

"I don't know what you've heard, new guy, but Elliot has never hurt me as you say he has. He's been one of the few people to stand by me this past year."

I move around him as he opens his mouth to say something, confusion furrowing his brow. I step up to Eli and offer him my hand. He gives me a small smile, and I roll my eyes, giving him a stern glare as he sighs.

He groans, "Fuck, dude, I think you broke my rib."

"Well that's just fucking great! We have a swim meet in two days, asshole. Maybe stop thinking with that thing between your legs and use your brain. You may not need the scholarship, but some of us here do." Someone from the table starts going off on Eli, and I can't help but agree. Pearl chips in, and I turn, giving her a glare.

"Why are you even fighting over that skank? She's washed up and used."

Before I can respond, Eli snaps out, telling her to shut her mouth. Then he turns towards everyone and yells at them all.

"Skye is not the bad guy here. She did not cause Brady's death, and the fact you all think that, proves that you don't deserve her. I'm done with all the lies, drama, and bullshit. I love this girl with my whole heart, and if you guys continue to talk badly about her," he pauses and glares at the girls, "then you can kiss our friendships goodbye." Bonnie starts to whine, and Sam tells her to shut up.

I tug gently on his hand and pull him towards the door. He needs to get checked over by the nurse. Ian moves like he's going to come too, but I shake my head. I don't know what it is about that boy, but I think we need some space.

We get into the hall, and Eli starts to apologize, but I'm tired and I don't want to hear it right now.

"I told you already, E, I'm not ready for anything serious." He stops walking and tugs my hand, pulling me into his chest with a wince and a sad sigh.

"Skye, you and Bash are my everything. I just want what's best for you, and that douche is not it." I scoff and wiggle, trying to get out of his hold. He gives me one more squeeze before letting me free.

"What makes you think that I'm even interested in the new guy?" I have to know if I'm being too obvious. He looks off down the hall and chuckles softly.

"How about the fact every time you're around him, you light up. Or the way he always seems to gravitate closer to you." I scoff and he growls, "Hell, Skye, the first time you met the guy he was licking your breasts!" I blink and wait for him to calm down.

"Just tell me if I'm wasting my time here. Because I would do anything to have you look at me the way you do him."

I shake my head and bite my lip. "I don't know what is going on between us, but I can tell you that lately you have been on my mind nonstop. Both of you." I look off and avoid his eyes. "It's crazy right? I don't even know the guy, and I can't stop feeling like I know him somehow. Like he's someone that has always been there." I sigh and rub my eyes.

"I don't know what to tell you about him, but I can tell you how I feel about you. It is not a waste of time. You have always been here for me. Through everything, you never tried to walk away and abandon me or Bash. I just need to take this slow, and lately, it's been a challenge."

He gets a cocky smirk on his face and his caramel eyes glisten as he fights not to laugh. I shake my head and roll my eyes.

"That's not what I meant. I just mean lately I've been feeling overwhelmed, and I don't think I can fight my attraction to the both of you anymore. I'm confused at how you both draw me in when I keep pushing you away." He sighs, then moves on towards the nurse. I wait for him to say something, but he seems lost in thought.

"I always did want a Skye sandwich," he says, looking back at me over his shoulder. He shoots me a wink, and my mouth drops. He laughs, then turns offering me his hand.

"Now please guide me to the woman that has an ice pack and maybe some Tylenol. Your new guy can give one hell of a headbutt." I roll my eyes and take his hand, following him a little ways down the hall.

"Ya know, if you didn't throw an alphahole hissy fit, this could have all been avoided."

His mouth drops, and he coughs, clearing his throat. Before he can speak, my phone rings, and I answer when Arielle flashes on the screen. She starts talking before I can even say hi.

"*What is this about a doctor appointment? And why didn't I know about it?"* She seems panicked, and I'm not sure why.

"Yeah, Bash has his seven month check up today after school. Eli and I are going to bring him after picking him up from my dad. You brought him to the diner right?" She mutters something in the background, but I can't make out what she's saying.

"Is everything okay, Arielle?" I ask, glancing Eli's way. He has his brows raised, and I shrug.

"Yes, dear, everything is fine. Just fine. Just don't let them run any tests on our little crab, okay?" My mind wants to argue, but my mouth says yes. The call drops, and I shake my head.

"That was weird." I tell Eli and he nods.

“What did she want?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure. I can’t remember. I must need a nap or something,” I say with a laugh. He takes my hand and walks with me to my Jeep. Forgoing the nurse’s office.

“Let’s stop by the coffee shop and grab you something, then get Bash from the diner. I can just grab an ice pack on the way.” I nod and let him open my door, not fighting when he asks to drive.

Skye

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"Hey Dr. Grimsby," I say as we walk into the Kelly Cove Pediatric's office. He stands from behind the desk and gives me a big smile.

"Skye, honey, how are you? How is your dad?" he asks before walking around and giving me a small hug.

"We're good. He said to say hi," I reply, pausing as someone from my past comes out of an office and walks our way.

"Don't tell me little Skye Banks is all grown up and a mom now." I blink a few times, and Eli coughs, pulling me back. Holy hotness. What the hell is up with my libido today? I give him a shy smile and a nervous giggle.

"Yeah, this is Sebastian, my son." I tell Eric Grimsby, a boy we all grew up with. Well he's far from a boy now. Eli takes Bash out of his carseat and hands him to me. Eric gives us a knowing look and laughs.

"He is a spitting image of his father. And Eric's four-o-clock patient." I look over at the doc with wide eyes, and he fights a smile.

"Eric has decided to join me here and help. As you know, I'm a few years out from retiring, and he just finished a rotation at medical school." I nod and hand him over to Eric.

"So, what should I call you then? Dr. Eric?" He shoots me a wink and laughs before turning down the hall and into the room he just left. We follow behind as Bash is giggling from the sounds Eric is making.

We walk into the exam room, and Eli shuts the door. Eric turns and gives us a look. "Okay mommy

and daddy, what seems to be the problem today?" My mouth dries, and I cough as Eli kinda gapes.

"I thought you knew. Umm, Sebastian is Brady's son," I choke out as Eric's smile slowly falls. Eric may be five years older than us, but he and Brady were close for a while. We all were. He clears his throat and nods.

"Yeah, I'm sorry, I did hear that. How are you holding up? I'm sorry I never came home for the memorial. School was hectic."

He tries to continue, but Bash lets out an ear piercing scream, stopping us all. I rush over to him and notice his leg is changing. He kicks his little feet super hard.

"What is going on?" I panic, and Eric comes over to see. He laughs and touches my shoulder. A wave of dizziness comes over me, and I stumble, leaning against Eli, who also seems a little dazed. I close my eyes and try to remember why my heart is racing. Eric continues to laugh as he changes Bash's dirty diaper.

"See, everything is all better. Seems like the little man decided to have a blowout while we were ignoring him." I shake off the cobwebs and lean over, giving him kisses all over his face. He squeals and grabs a fistful of my thick, brown hair. He seems perfectly content now.

What the hell just happened?

We drive down to the beach to get Bash a small treat. He was so good for the doctor and barely cried when they checked his ears. Eric told me we could start to give him some different foods, but to be wary of allergies and to avoid honey.

Eli had opened a note doc on his phone and was so cute as he asked all sorts of questions, making some notes. I think he's really serious about being a dad to Bash. I just hope my feelings for the new boy don't destroy what we could have.

Speaking of Ian, he and his bright red-haired friend are walking along the beach towards the big house on the corner. Hmm, I wonder if that's where he's staying?

"So, you really do like that guy?" Eli asks, handing over my cone, following where my attention currently is.

I give him a shrug and take a bite of ice cream. A small moan leaves my lips due to the creamy flavor. I glance around and relax. I love this place. I don't know what it is, but we always find ourselves back here on the beach where we first met. Bash giggles, and I smile down at him in his stroller, giving him a little of the frozen berry mix we got him. He's still a little young for dairy.

"I'm not sure what I feel yet. I just know that there is something about him. I'd like to find out more." Eli nods, then faces the waves. Today is a perfect day for surfing.

"I just realized I haven't been surfing in a few weeks now. That's not like me," I say with a frown, and he turns, giving me a huge smile.

"Well I have a solution to that. Let's go to Tyrulia Cove this weekend and compete." I freeze; my pulse races, and my hands get sweaty.

Just think babe, next year we can compete in the big leagues. I know you're going to dominate those waves and get some killer sponsors. The world doesn't know what's about to come their way like a tsunami.

"Skye, are you listening?" I close my eyes and take some deep breaths before facing Eli. I give him a shaky smile and nod.

"I don't know about competing, but I wouldn't mind going to watch." He gives me a deep look, and I know he can see where my thoughts are. He leans in and places a sweet kiss to my lips before sighing.

"He would want you to compete, but I won't pressure you. I'll make the arrangements tonight."

He finishes his cone and tosses the trash away before bending down and scooping up a squirmy little codfish. Bash immediately rests his head on his chest and places his thumb in his mouth. I watch in amazement as my heart flutters and my panties dampen.

"He really loves you," I mutter. Eli places a kiss to the top of his head then shoots me a huge grin.

"I would be good for him, for you too. I would spend the rest of my life making you happy. But I know you're not ready yet, and because I'm a foolish idiot in love with a stubborn woman, I'm willing to do anything for… I guess I'll even let you start your own harem."

My eyes bug, and I snort before choking out, "My own what?" He rolls his eyes and rubs Bash's back.

"I know what kind of books you girls read. All about one girl with multiple boyfriends. I'm willing to try. Plus, I'll admit he's kinda hot. I wouldn't mind testing the waters with him myself."

Mind blown. I open and close my mouth a few times, trying to think of something to say back. I nod dumbly and continue eating my ice cream. He lets me have a moment to process as he tosses Bash in the air and tickles his sides.

"Do you guys want to come back to my place? I know Mom would love to see you, and we can watch a movie or something." I check my phone for any messages and nod. I don't have to work tonight, and I wouldn't mind spending some more time with Eli.

"Yeah, sounds good." He puts Bash back into his stroller and buckles him in.

"Hear that, little man? You get to come home with me and see Nana." I pause at that and my heart melts.

She really is like another grandma to him, and I'm so blessed to have her in our lives. I wonder what my mother would have been like. Would she have been super chill like my dad, a homemaker and amazing baker like Eli's mom, or sweet and understanding like Brady's mom?

I wish I could just know why? Why she felt she needed to leave?

I WALK into Eli's room, smiling at his mother talking with Bash. The moment we walked inside, she stole him from my arms and refused to give him back. She suggested we watch a movie here and have some alone time. My eyebrows rose at that, but she only laughed. Eli didn't need to be told twice and grabbed my hand, dragging me down the hall. His door shuts and strong arms wrap around my stomach, pulling me back against a hard chest.

"Do you know how many times I have fantasized about this moment? Having you here in my room, wrapped in my arms."

I shudder and bite my lip when he growls into my ear. His hot breath trails my neck, and I'm on the verge of moaning. Ever since that dream last night, my body has been wound up tight, begging for

some kind of release.

I inch forward and spin to face him. His eyes hold hesitance, but my smile brings one in return. I place my hand on his cheek and pull him down as I step up on my tip-toes.

The moment our lips touch, he groans and grips the back of my neck, holding me to him tight. I sigh, opening my mouth for him to take over. He doesn't waste any time, kissing me as if I'm the air he needs to breathe.

My back hits the edge of his mattress, and I let out a tiny squeal as he lets me fall. He stands above me, watching my tits bounce, and I laugh. Licking his lips, he tosses me a wink before jumping on top of me and kissing me again with a growl.

A soft knock on the door has us pulling apart and panting heavily. "Hey guys, Bash and I are going to go for a little stroll. It's such a nice night out. We will be back in exactly thirty minutes. Elliot, I love you, but you better be smart and use protection." She finishes having a conversation with the closed door before walking away. My mouth drops, and my face heats. Eli starts to laugh, and I shove his shoulder, rolling him onto his back.

"This is not funny. Oh my god. I can never face her again." He pulls me down on top of him and continues to laugh into my neck.

"Skye, babe, we still have our clothes on. You haven't stolen my virtue… yet." He pulls back and gives me a smirk. I burst out in giggles.

"You are hilarious. Virtue. You haven't been innocent since you were fifteen, mister. Yeah, I was there when you told Brady everything," I say through my laughs. His eyes heat, and he tosses me onto my back before hovering.

I stare up into his caramel eyes and lift my hand to push some fallen blond waves from his face. Lowering slightly, he kisses me again. This time slow and deep before pulling back and groaning.

"You are killing me right now." I glance down and can tell he's swollen. I look back up at him and bite my lip.

"I'm not ready for sex. I've only ever been with Brady, and I always thought he would be my only one. After having Bash, sex just hasn't seemed like an issue."

"I don't want sex, Skye." I raise my brows at that, and he smacks himself in the face. "No, obviously I want sex, I just mean there are a lot of other things I have dreamed about doing with you." My face heats, and I know he can tell I'm blushing. I give him a little nod, and he growls before pouncing. My shorts are ripped off so fast I yelp.

"Eli, gah, slow do–" I try to finish that thought, but the moment he kisses my thigh and licks up, I'm a goner. He looks up at me between my thighs, and I'm already close just from how long it's been and the look of pure lust in his eyes.

He starts slowly licking me deep and flicking my clit. I grab his hair and hold on tight, making him groan. The vibrations set me off. I start grinding into his face, and he grips my butt hard, pulling me closer. Thank god he's an amazing swimmer, otherwise, I would worry about him drowning.

My fingers clench as my body shakes, and the orgasm rolls through me. He moans and licks me one more time. I release his hair and gently push him away. He looks up at me with a giant grin, his lips glistening with my juices.

I lean up on my elbows as he moves back to my mouth. I place a soft kiss on his lips, sighing. He rolls me to my side and climbs behind me, wrapping his arms around me, then grabs a blanket to cover us. I can feel how hard he is as he grinds into my back, and I move my hand around to rub him. He groans and gently grips my wrist; he moves it to my front and squeezes me tighter. I frown and turn my head, but his lips land on my temple and he starts to talk.

“As much as I want you to touch me, tonight was all about you. I can wait, Skye.” I sigh, relaxing into him more.

“Is it wrong to want to move on, Eli? I feel like I may be ready, but at the same time, I’m scared.” I wipe my eye, and he rolls me to face him.

“No, Skye, it just shows how real and genuine you are. Brady was your everything. I get it, trust me. I miss him too. Every day. But having you and Sebastian in my life helps. Take your time, and whenever you’re ready, I’ll be here.”

I lean in and kiss him gently. I know he’s right, and I think I’m ready. I’ll always feel some semblance of guilt, but I know that Brady would want me to be happy. And Eli makes me happy. I’m still not ready to commit to just him, at least until I know for sure what’s going on with the new guy, but I think maybe, just maybe, it’s time. And I want to show Eli just how much I appreciate him.

Elliot

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"Do me a favor?" I ask Skye before she leaves. I wanted them to stay the night, but I know it's too soon for that. She smiles, her eyes bright green and filled with life. If she wasn't watching me right now, I would give myself a pat on the back. I have been trying for so long now just to see her happy.

"I don't know, E, I seem to be giving you a lot of favors lately," she says with a pout and I frown. Rolling her eyes, she giggles, placing Bash in his carseat. My mom really tired him out, and he barely stirs. After they got back from their walk, she brought him to us to snuggle.

All three of us curled up in my bed, watching a movie. It was perfect. I can picture many more nights like that. I can even picture another person in that bed with us, even though it makes me a bit growly.

I frown as Skye turns to face me. "Don't be such a guppy. If you frown, you'll get wrinkles." I laugh and shake my head. Ever since we have watched that movie, Skye has been obsessed with calling me 'guppy'; she says it because I swim like a fish.

I reach in and snatch her, pulling her tight into my arms and kissing her hard until she moans and turns to goo. I pull away to let her breathe, and she bats her eyes for a second.

"Wow," she gasps before clearing her throat. "You wanted to ask me for something," she reminds me, and I rub the back of my neck nervously, glancing at the sky then back to her.

"Promise me you won't pull away from me after what happened tonight. I know you are unsure, but what's happening between us just feels so…right."

She flushes pink, and even in the moonlight, it's like her beautiful face is glowing. I reach out and

wrap my arm around her waist, pulling her back into my chest. A sigh escapes her lips as she melts into my body. If I could tie her to my bed and keep her here all night, I would in a heartbeat.

"I won't pull away from you, Eli, but I'm not ready to put a name on what we have going on right now. I hope you can understand that," she murmurs into my shirt as she clutches me to her a little bit tighter.

I exhale a sigh of relief at the notion that she isn't totally shutting down what could be between us. I know this new guy is on her mind too, and that has to be confusing, especially since he just showed up out of nowhere.

"I can live with that, Lil' Mama." She reaches up and kisses me one last time before saying good night, jumping in her Jeep and driving away.

After her headlights disappear from my view, I turn towards the waves crashing onto the shore and shove my hands in my pockets, just taking a minute for myself. I'm glad we decided to get redressed after messing around. Otherwise my mom would have walked in on quite a scene. That would have been a first; I have never brought a girl home to my bed. Skye is and will be the only one.

I was being truthful when I told her I didn't need anything. I was fine just finally getting to show her how much I love her, but she insisted, and I'm so honored she did. I know Brady has been her one and only, so for her to open up to me touching, kissing, and even returning the favor is a big deal.

I hope this weekend goes well. Competing was always a big thing for Brady, Skye, and me. I know that if he was here, he would want us to go. He loved the way Skye would always light up, even if she didn't place in the top three.

A small hand touches my arm and I startle. A soft laugh flits through the fall breeze and I smile.

"She's good for you, Elliot. I haven't seen you this happy in a long time now." My mom turns to face me with a mischievous grin on her face.

"Don't think I didn't know what was going on earlier though. Bash is adorable, and I love him with all my heart, but be smart, okay?" I give her a nod, and she laughs before walking away. "Oh to be young and in love again," she sings-songs as she goes. I shake my head and laugh, but she's right. I am happy. I finally have my girl.

I need to make sure this weekend is perfect. I pull my phone out and look up the hotel that sponsors us every year. They give us a great discount on rooms, and I know we will need at least two. I enter my credit card info and grin when I see that one of the rooms has a huge tub. Maybe I can convince Skye to take a bath with me.

There is also something I have been planning to do, but I need help, and I'm going to have to be extremely sneaky. I pull up her number and wait for her to answer.

"Eli, right now isn't the best time."

"Is everything okay? I kinda needed your help." I sigh, and she groans.

"Okay, I'll be over in a few minutes, but you owe me."

"Anything and it's yours. Thank you, Nina. Hey, also bring Meg." She yells at someone then says they are on their way. Well that was easy… I think.

As I wait for them to arrive, I look at designs and try to pick the best one. I have narrowed it down to three, and I think whatever one we chose will be perfect. The Jeep headlights pull into the driveway and two doors slam.

"Okay, Romeo, we have arrived. What is this clandestine meeting all about?" Meg asks as she comes over and gives me a big kiss on the cheek. I laugh and pull her into a tight hug. I have missed her these past few weeks. Nina comes up behind her, but she looks like a jellyfish stung her or something.

"You good?" I grunt, and she nods, but still has her lips pursed.

"Ignore her. She's pissed that the new guy, Ian, doesn't like her." I pause a second before laughing abruptly, and they both jump. She gives me a glare and spins to leave.

"You know what? I'm not in the mood for this shit right now. I'm going home." Wow, she really is in a mood. I race after her and gently grab her arm, stopping her.

"No, wait. I'm sorry. I just thought you knew that he's been sniffing around Skye." I trail off not wanting to hurt her feelings. Nina has always had a huge heart, and I can't believe I'm just now learning that she likes him. What is it about the Banks sisters and this guy?

"What? How is this the first I've heard about this? Holy crap, do you think he's using our tutoring to get closer to her?" Her face falls before I can even reply. "He is. I don't know how I didn't see it before."

"I'm sorry, Nina. I really thought it was obvious." I pull her into a tight hug before releasing her and taking her back over to where Meg is waiting for us.

"So yeah, thanks for coming. I have an idea I wanted to run by you all. Skye is doing better, and I'm nervous this may set her back." I pause for a minute, and they move closer. "I want to get something on Skye's board to represent Brady. I have been thinking about this for a while now, and I want to surprise her at the competition. Daniel at the shop is ready and waiting. I just need some help making the final decision." I show them my phone with a few scripts I found.

"Oh. Eli," Nina cries before her eyes start to water. "That's… That is…" Meg wraps her arm around her, wiping her own eyes, and I know I may start to blubber like a baby too. Brady meant a lot to all of us, more to me and Skye, but we have all been friends for a really long time. It's just not the same with him gone.

"That one is the one," Meg says, pointing and I have to agree.

I clear my throat a couple of times and somehow end up in a three person, group hug, full of sniffles, then laughter. "I need someone to sneak the board over to the shop and then someone to drive it to Tyrulia Cove on Saturday morning. I want this to be a surprise." Meg volunteers to drive it up since she's competing, and Nina starts a fake coughing fit.

"I think… I may be coming down with something." I laugh at her acting, and she groans. "I'll work on it." We all laugh and hug one last time before they head home. I love these girls, and I'm so thankful they have my girl's back.

IT'S LATE when I finally climb into bed, and I text Skye goodnight. She writes back immediately, and I'm shocked she's still awake. I thought I would have worn her out. The brightness of my screen has me wincing so I opt to call her. The line rings once before she answers.

"Hey, handsome. Can't sleep?" she asks in her sexy, sleepy tone, and I fight not to rub my hardening cock.

"Yeah, I was just doing some last minute things for the trip this weekend. You're still coming with me right?" She laughs gently, and I can tell she just shook her head.

"*Honestly tell me, do I have a choice?"* I laugh and tell her no. She groans but then laughs. *"So, would you hate me if I maybe invited Ian to come, too?"* I sit up against my pillows, confused. When

did she have time to invite him? I go to ask, but she keeps talking.

"I ran into him on the beach, and we had a really nice talk. I'm still suspicious of him, but I think his cocky attitude is a front. He's actually super sweet." She trails off with a yawn. I close my eyes and listen to her soft breathing. I wish she had stayed so I could hold her. *"Eli?"*

Oh, right. "Whatever you want Skye. This weekend is for us to get away and have some fun. If you want to bring him along that's fine, but I'm driving." She yawns again, and I fight the urge to tell her I love her. We say goodnight, and I end the call. I look out my window and stare at the night sky.

"I hope you know what you're doing, Brady," I grunt before turning my bedside light off and laying down. I know he has to have something to do with this.

I'M on the cliff again, but this time Brady isn't there. He's floating in front of me over the waves. "Stop fucking around, man." I curse, and he laughs, giving me the smile I love and miss.

"It's time, E, you need to man up and take charge. Skye is ready. Don't let her fears ruin something amazing." I scoff and climb to my feet, careful not to fall over the edge. I wish I could grab him and wrap him into my arms. Kiss him one last time. I miss him so much.

"I don't want to spook her, and now there is someone else in the picture." I shake my head and he grunts.

"Yeah, I've been watching him. He's a bit odd but harmless. He seems to really like her and my son. I think what this is becoming is going to be good for you all. I just wish I could be there too." My hands shake, and I try to reach for him. He appeases me by moving a little closer to hold my hand.

"I love you, E. Take care of them, okay? If I had to pick anyone on this planet to love and care for them, it would have been you." Fuck this. I take his hand and pull myself off the cliff towards him. I just need him.

He wraps me in his arms and kisses my forehead. I take a deep breath trying to calm the raging emotions warring inside me. I really wish I could be wherever he is, but that would mean leaving Skye, and I don't think I could do that. Not yet, anyway.

"I love you, Brady." I whisper as he starts to fade, giving me one last smile. His arms loosen and I fall.

I WAKE up panting on the floor of my bedroom. Tears running down my face, and my hands clinging to my sheets. I lie there a few moments, thinking about my dream. I know it wasn't real, but I feel as if it held a deeper meaning. As if my calls were finally answered.

Skye

I SAY goodbye with one more quick kiss before climbing in my Jeep and heading home. It's late, way past Bash's bed time, but the walk with Eliza knocked him out. I hope he sleeps through the night after I bring him in.

Eli was right that whatever is happening between us just feels right. But even though tonight was amazing, I can't stop that little niggle of guilt that is creeping up on me. Brady was supposed to be my forever, but he was ripped away from me. The rational part of my brain knows I deserve happiness, even though Brady is gone.

I'm so scared that I am going to fall head over heels again for someone, mainly Eli, maybe even Ian, and I would lose them too. It's not just me that I have to worry about. I am a mother now, and I have to think of my son when I make decisions these days.

He deserves to have every happiness that I can possibly give to him. Even if that means my heart has to sit on the sidelines. I have a lot to think about, and all I want is to put Bash to bed and take a hot shower.

As I pull up the short driveway to the house, a sharp pain starts to throb in my chest. Just great, this is just what I need tonight. I haven't had many episodes lately, but I have noticed that even though they are rare, the pain is a lot stronger. I wish the doctors could figure this shit out already. It's not grief. There is something going on.

Turning off my Jeep, I take a few deep breaths then open my door. I grab Bash before stumbling to the front steps. If someone saw me right now they would think I had been drinking. Laughter sounds through the screen door, and I groan when a deep voice resonates through the house. Something about making homemade seaweed puffs.

"That sounds absolutely disgusting," Nina says with a flirty laugh. Another sharp pain hits, and I almost drop Bash as I fight to open the screen door while clutching my chest to get the ache to stop. A whimper leaves my lips, and their conversation stops.

"Skye, is that you? How was the doctor's appointment?" Nina shouts from the dining room as I finally make it inside. I place a sleeping Bash on the floor in his carseat as gently as I can and follow her voice. I think I may need her help.

When I break through the entrance way, I pause. I knew he was here, but seeing his aqua eyes filled with laughter and attraction pointed towards someone else has me gasping for air. The throbbing gets worse, and my vision gets hazy. I need some air or water. I think I may pass out.

Ian looks over at me and gives me a beaming grin. His smile falters at whatever he sees on my face.

"I… I need some water," I say with a dry throat. Nina raises her brows at me and shrugs. I stumble from the dining room and over to the kitchen sink. I grip the counter and fight not to cry. The pains in my chest are stronger than normal, and sweat is starting to bead along my brow. My legs shake, and I think I may vomit. I reach up in the cupboard for a glass, and a warm body presses against my back. I freeze for a moment, then sigh when I feel instant relief from the pain.

"Are you okay?" he grumbles, pressing his lips to my neck, breathing in the smell of my shampoo. I shiver at his touch.

"My chest hurts," I pant, and he places a hand along my chest over my heart, and the sharp pains go away completely. I lean back against him and take a moment to just relax. "How did you do that?" I softly moan at the relief.

Something hard presses into my lower back, and Ian freezes before releasing me and rushing out of the kitchen.

"I'll see you at school, Nina," he shouts before the front door slams. I turn and zone out, staring at the crashing waves glistening in the moonlight. They seem angry tonight. Temperamental and dangerous. Reminds me of the boy that just rushed out of here. I fill up a glass of water and chug it down. Nina comes in pissed and I groan.

“What did you say to Ian? We were having a good time until you came home.” I shrug and shake my head. She huffs before stomping to her room. Her door slamming echoes in the quiet house. I wait, yep there it is. Thanks a lot, sis.

Bash starts to cry in the other room, and I mutter a few curses under my breath as I make my way to the living room. I take him from his seat and walk over to his room. It’s late, and I think we will need to skip bath time tonight.

I quickly change him, rub him down with some lavender lotion, and put on his PJs. He’s back to sleep in no time, and I watch him while humming a lullaby my mother sang to me. I have always loved the tune, but I struggle to remember the words. I only know they had something to do with the sea.

I move over to my room and take a quick shower, then throw on some pajama shorts and one of Brady’s T-shirts. I need to take a walk and clear my head. The Jeep is gone by the time I finish, so I know Nina decided to go out. I knock on my dad’s door and let him know I’m going for a walk. He’s engrossed in a show and waves me away.

I leave Bash with him and walk out onto the sand. The night air chills my heated skin, and I shiver. I turn back inside and grab a hoodie from the hook before shrugging it on and begin moving along the path I am all too familiar with. So much has happened today, and I need to talk to Brady. I know he won’t answer, but I need to get this guilt and shame off my chest. Logically I know what I did wasn’t cheating and that Brady would want me to move on, but still I feel as if I did something wrong.

Moving along the shoreline, I let the cool water brush along my ankles for a few moments before stopping and gazing out at the dark unknown. The waves have settled, and if it wasn’t nighttime and extremely dangerous, not to mention sharks’ feeding time, I would go for a swim. Let the tide wash away my stress and worries.

I shuffle in up to my ankles, then move along the shore. A shadow up ahead has me stopping and contemplating if I should go home. I really don’t want to see anyone else tonight, or deal with some Sea Skanks drama.

They step into the light, and a familiar lime green shirt catches my eye. I hesitate before moving closer. He’s talking to himself, muttering to the waves about who knows what. I don’t want to interrupt whatever he is trying to work out, and I can't really judge since I talk to Brady almost every night, but I do want to find out why he’s here. In the spot I lost Brady. In the place I almost died. Where someone saved my life.

I get about a foot from him before he notices my presence. He turns to face me, giving me a sheepish smile. The white of his teeth gleaming in the light from the moon.

“Are you stalking me?” I joke, and he freezes as if he was caught. I giggle lightly and he relaxes.

“My house is over that dune,” he mumbles, pointing behind me and kicking some sand as he shuffles side to side.

“You mean the mansion on the cliff? The one that is covered in trees and has a huge ass gate?” He nods, avoiding my eyes.

“Do I make you nervous or something?” I ask. I’m trying to lighten the mood, but he looks so serious all of a sudden.

“What is going on with you and Eli? You say he would never hurt you, yet you always have this cloud of sadness around you.” I stumble back a step as if he just slapped me.

“How would you know? Are you watching me?” I’m seriously starting to question his sanity.

“No, I’m not watching you.” He gets this incredulous look on his face. “Just, it seems like whenever I see you, you’re sad,” he explains, shrugging his shoulders.

“There’s a lot about me that you don’t know,” I say as I start walking down the beach again,

almost positive that he will follow me.

He mutters something under his breath, then quickens his pace, catching up to me.

"I'd like to know. Things. About you, I mean," he mumbles and I sigh.

"How about I ask you some stuff first. Quid pro quo?" He nods, and I take that as my cue to start. I start off with something easy.

"So, how do you like Kelly Cove?" I ask him as he avoids stepping into the water. What is his deal? I am so tempted to lean down and splash him, maybe he would lighten up a little. He seems so tense.

"I like it. It's a lot brighter than I imagined." I snort and glance his way. He's staring at me and doesn't look away when I catch him. He's always watching me it seems; maybe I really do have a stalker.

"What was your last home, a cave or something?" I joke, and he grumbles under his breath, but I can't hear him over the waves cresting the cliffs. He stops walking and turns facing the dark sea, seeming to look for something. He nods to himself before turning back to me.

"I have never been in a place like this. I like the sunshine; the warmth it gives off. I'm excited to see snow too." I snort at that, and he looks over at me.

"We don't get snow here. But I'm planning to leave Kelly Cove and go exploring after graduation. Who knows, maybe you can come with us." He gives me a beaming grin, and I get lost for a second.

"Is it my turn now?" he asks, and I nod. We move farther down the beach, closer to Oceanic and the lights now show me his handsome face.

"Tell me why you're sad." I stop next to a small bench and take a seat. He follows and sits beside me, turning to face me. I shake my head.

"How is it that you have been here for a few weeks now and still don't know every little detail of my life? I seem to be the town's greatest source of gossip these days." He reaches out for my hand, and I relax at his touch.

"I may have heard things, but I wish to hear *your* truth. Gossip is always over exaggerated, and some of the people at school are just cruel." I laugh at that and wipe under my eye.

"You have no idea how cruel they can be. To think we were all once best friends." I pause, and he waits for me to answer his question. "I lost someone. Someone I loved more than the tide and the moon. Someone that was my everything." I look off at the sea. Taking a minute to fight my emotions. His hand leaves mine and touches my cheek, making me gasp.

"One of the things I like about you, Skye, is that your heart is so big. People back home are fake and only think of themselves. It's hard to find someone like you."

I get lost in his eyes, and he leans in closer. Is he going to kiss me? Am I going to let him? He shakes his head with a sigh and releases me.

"So, this person you talk about losing, is he the father of your son?"

"Yes, Brady. He was my best friend since childhood, my first love. My first everything. He…" I choke back a sob and lean into Ian as he wraps an arm around me. "He drowned before I even knew I was pregnant. He would have been an amazing father to Bash. I miss him every day. I think I always will." I rest my head on his shoulder as we watch the waves for a few minutes in silence.

Someone shouts from down the beach, and I notice how late it's getting. I shift slightly, and he removes his arm from around me. I groan and rub my eyes.

"I need to get home and check on Bash." He stands and offers me his hand.

"Let me walk you." I nod and let him guide me to my feet.

"So tell me about Bash. Is it normal to have a child so young?" I gasp, I'm not sure if I should be

offended or not. He drops my hand and rubs the back of his neck. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that as an insult.” I look for the truth in his eyes before answering.

“Not normally, no. But sometimes things happen, and though I know I’m young, I am so incredibly grateful to have him. I’ll always have a piece of his father.” I start to laugh and ramble about how amazing my son is, and he listens intently as we walk. We reach the spot where I saw him earlier, and he stops, turning to face me.

“I like seeing you smile. The way your eyes light up and the little dimple you have right here.” He touches the corner of my mouth and I pause. Sparks run through my skin, and I have a sudden urge to kiss him.

“I need to know one thing,” I state louder than I meant to, and his eyes bug as if I’m asking him for a blood sample or something. I laugh and soften my stance. I don’t know why he acts so odd with me. He clears his throat then nods. “Do you like my sister? If you do, then why are you constantly touching me or staring at me?”

He blinks then offers me a cocky smirk. “I like her, yes, as a friend. But Skye, you have been the one on my mind for a long time.” He doesn’t offer more, and I let the subject drop for the time being.

We reach my house, and the lights are all off inside. I hope Bash stayed asleep for my dad. I know I take advantage of my family too much sometimes. The motion sensors click on, and Ian walks over to the rack holding our surfboards along the side of the house.

“I’ve never been surfing, but it looks like it would be a blast,” he states as he gently touches the gloss on my board. My eyes widen, and I laugh.

“How have you never been surfing? Are you scared of the water or something?” He laughs loudly, if not a little nervously, and I nod. “Your secret is safe with me, but if you would ever like to learn… I could help you. My dad taught me when I was a toddler.”

He shakes his head and looks off at the sea. “I’m not sure that would be a good idea, but maybe. I think I’ll just stick to watching for now."

“Oh, this weekend there is a real surf competition. It seems Eli and Nina thought it’d be a good idea to sign me up. I don’t know why, since I haven’t competed in over a year, but we’ll see what happens,” I say with a nervous laugh.

He looks at me as if he’s trying to understand my words. I shake my head and wave my hand. “Sorry, point is… I’d like you to come? Maybe? I don’t know what it is about you Ian, but I seem to like you. I think. I don’t know, things are so crazy right now.”

He gives me a beaming grin and nods excitedly before stepping closer to me and pulling me into a tight hug. Pin pricks run down my spine at his touch, and I find myself inching closer as if to kiss him. Nina opens the back door breaking the spell I always seem to fall under when he’s near.

“Are you coming?” Nina snaps. I glance over at her and nod, then say goodnight to Ian and watch as he walks towards his house. He glances back at me over his shoulder and I sigh.

What is this connection between us and why can’t I fight it?

Caspian

CHAPTER TWENTY

I knock on the door and wait, I know Skye's not here because her vehicle's gone, which means another pointless tutoring session with her sister. Even if I do laugh and have fun with Nina, it's only innocent fun, nothing more than a distraction while waiting for Skye to show up.

I think Nina's on to me when it comes to Human education though. It's mainly why we laugh so much. She asks me a question, which must be basic knowledge for their species, like what's two plus two. I have enough sense to understand it's mathematical as we have a similar system, but ours isn't with what the Humans call numbers, but is instead a picture system of sorts. So, even though I feel like a complete idiot, I put on the charm, shrug, and answer honestly. Which is, I don't know, and she laughs so hard she makes a weird noise called a snort out of her nose, and then the ridiculousness of it makes me laugh. Nothing gets done. Even though I'm deflated, I still hold out hope through the session that Skye might show up.

And just like always, I turned into an adolescent who can't control his dick and breathed all over her like a psycho. She was obviously distressed and in pain, but it still didn't deter my body from letting her know how I felt about her.

Even though I saw her legs close tighter and could smell the lust in the air… her words said another thing and it wasn't approval. She was in pain.

So, I fucked it up again. I could tell by the tone of her voice. Screw her eyes, they always tell me she's drawn to me. Apparently, they're liars.

I miss the water.

So fucking bad.

After another fuck up with Skye, I'm miserable. In all aspects of my life, I'm wondering if coming to shore was a mistake. My kingdom is in chaos right now, and there is nothing I can do to help it. That, and the fact that I am most likely the cause of it all, pounds the words, *fuck up*, in my head.

The sun is setting so I take my time leaving Skye and Nina's house to walk the shore and think of how long I've wanted to do just what I'm doing right now.

I stop and look out to the rock I used to hide behind and watch her. I can't even stop the scoff that comes out of my mouth. I'm such a fucking creeper. In the water I'm a prince, soon to be King. The first King to unite two enemy kingdoms. I'd be in our history books, alongside my soon-to-be bitch-ass wife, Kassia. I've done good for my kingdom… or, I've tried.

Yet, I've come up to the shore as a nobody. Up until now it's been refreshing, but with everything going on in my kingdom and me feeling like I'm nothing more than some stalker to Skye, I'm not sure. I think it again, like I do a million times on repeat–like a mourning whale for her lost calf–I wish mate calls with Humans worked like the Sirens. If it did, she would have felt our draw right away. She wouldn't fight the attraction to me, but embrace it immediately. Flaunt it. Love it. Desire it.

This is nothing more than a guessing game at best. One minute I'm so sure she feels what I feel… and the next, I'm feeling like this.

Mate calls. The thought stops me in my tracks at acknowledging Skye as my mate.

But what about what the sea witch said? I quickly shake off that thought, the last thing I want to be thinking about is that old crazy bat.

The sound of sand being displaced on the beach startles me out of my inner musings. I spin around, worried that the Nix army might have found me, but I am rewarded with the beautiful sight of Skye bathed in moonlight. I give her a sheepish smile and pray to whoever might be listening that she didn't hear my inner thoughts as I rambled them out loud.

"Are you stalking me?"

My eyes widen, and my whole body locks up. She couldn't have known that I'd been following her around, right? Her answering giggle to my 'surfer caught in a shark's sight' look makes me relax, knowing that she was just joking.

"My house is over that dune," I mumble, coming up with a quick answer to fool her and pointing beyond her shoulders. I shuffle around, stuffing my hands in my pockets and kicking up sand with my shoes.

"You mean the mansion on the cliff? The one that is covered in trees and has a huge ass gate?" I nod my head, not looking at her cause I know it's a little ostentatious, but how can I tell her that it's been in my family for years.

"Do I make you nervous or something?" She questions, mistaking my silence for nerves, but really I'm working up to asking the main question that I really want an answer to. I guess here goes nothing. I won't know unless I ask.

"What is going on with you and Eli? You say he would never hurt you, yet you always have this cloud of sadness around you." I ask, harsher than I meant to, but damn, that guy really dries my tail at the way he is always around and trying to keep her from me.

She stumbles across the sand and a look of disbelief takes over her face. "How would you know? Are you watching me?"

"No, I'm not watching you." Geez, this again? I wish she would stop with that idea before I screw up and admit to it. "Just, it seems like whenever I see you, you're sad," I explain my reason as simple as that and shrug my shoulders for good measure, hoping to throw her off and make her believe me.

"There's a lot about me that you don't know," she states matter-of-factly and starts walking again,

leaving me standing here alone.

"Always saying the wrong thing. Stupid, stupid." I mumble to myself, then high-tail it, and catch up with her. "I'd like to know. Things. About you, I mean."

"How about I ask you some stuff first. Quid pro quo?" She asks. I nod; I can definitely handle that as long as she doesn't ask me any Human stuff. I don't know enough to be able to answer that, and it would look weird if I have to use my call to ask Kelby for the answers.

"So, how do you like Kelly Cove?" Okay, her first question is easy enough. A wave comes further up on the shore, and I move further up the beach, avoiding the water. The last thing I want is to accidentally lose my hold on my Human form.

"I like it. It's a lot brighter than I imagined." She snorts and glances in my direction. I can't help but stare at her, and even though she's totally busted me, I just can't seem to look away.

"What was your last home, a cave or something?" She jokes, but damn, if she knew the truth I know she would most likely run from me and I would never see her again.

I curse a few times under my breath, wishing I could just open up and tell her everything. Something among the waves catches my attention so I stop walking and look out over the dark waters. Whatever it was seems to be gone now, but I'm hoping that it wasn't anything that could pose a risk to Skye, or myself.

I turn back to my original path and start walking again, finally answering her. "I have never been in a place like this. I like the sunshine; the warmth it gives off. I'm excited to see snow too." She snorts again at my comment, and my gaze shifts to her.

"We don't get snow here. But I'm planning to leave Kelly Cove and go exploring after graduation. Who knows, maybe you can come with us."

Her answer makes my heart beat at a rapid pace, and I can't help the beaming grin I aim at her. She gets the goofiest love sick look on her face as she stares at me, and as much as I enjoy her looking at me like that, I know I need to snap her out of it somehow.

"Is it my turn now?" I ask, startling her out of the trance she was in, and she nods her head in answer. We continue our trek down the beach, and the farther we go, the closer to that restaurant, *Oceanic*, we get.

"Tell me why you're sad." It's another question that has been plaguing me, but I feel like I already know the answer.

We come across a small bench resting out here in the sand, and she sits down, looking partially lost in thought. I sit down next to her and angle myself so she knows that she has my full attention.

"How is it that you have been here for a few weeks now and still don't know every little detail of my life? I seem to be the town's greatest source of gossip these days."

The people of this town suck if all they can do is gossip about her. She deserves better than that. I reach out and take her small hand in my larger one, and she relaxes under my touch.

"I may have heard things, but I wish to hear your truth. Gossip is always over exaggerated, and some of the people at school are just cruel."

She laughs and wipes her eyes. "You have no idea how cruel they can be. To think we were all once best friends." She pauses as if she is trying to find the right words to explain. "I lost someone. Someone I loved more than the tide and the moon. Someone that was my everything." After dropping her truth, she looks off at the sea. I see nothing but heartbreak in her gaze, and it's not a look I like seeing on her face. Taking my hand from hers, I reach out and cup her cheek. The contact tingles, making her inhale sharply.

Gently, I turn her face back towards me. "One of the things I like about you, Skye, is that your

heart is so big. People back home are fake and only think of themselves. It's hard to find someone like you."

Time seems to slow as I get lost in her beautiful green eyes, the urge to kiss her rides me and before I even know what I'm doing, I start leaning in, wanting nothing more than to feel her lips on mine.

Her eyes flutter closed, and that knocks me out of my trance. I quickly shake my head to diffuse the fog, and with a sigh, I drop my hand from her face. *Man, what am I thinking? I can't kiss her again, no matter how badly I want to.*

"So, this person you talk about losing, is he the father of your son?" I hate the look of disappointment on her face, but this is just how things need to be.

"Yes, Brady. He was my best friend since childhood, my first love. My first everything. He…" She stutters out, unable to finish what she is saying as tears gather in her eyes. She leans into me for support, and I wrap my arms around her, giving her strength to continue.

"He drowned before I even knew I was pregnant. He would have been an amazing father to Bash. I miss him every day. I think I always will."

The sound of someone shouting somewhere on the beach pulls us from the peaceful moment we are sharing. She starts to move away from me, and I know that's a sign that she is ready to move on from here.

"I need to get home and check on Bash."

"Let me walk you." I offer and hold out my hand for her to take. She gingerly places hers in mine, and I pull her off the bench.

"So tell me about Bash. Is it normal to have a child so young?" She gasps at me wide eyed, and I inwardly groan, knowing I messed that question up. I rub the back of my neck and look over at her sheepishly. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that as an insult."

"Not normally, no. But sometimes things happen, and though I know I'm young, I am so incredibly grateful to have him. To have a piece of his father always." She rambles on and on about her son, and I don't want to stop her because I love the sound of her voice when she gets excited talking about him.

We finally make it back to where we started our walk down the beach; I stop and turn to face her.

"I like seeing you smile. The way your eyes light up and the little dimple you have right here." I reach out and brush my thumb at the corner of her plump lips. Those beautiful sparks that electrify my skin every time we touch, sends a shiver down my spine.

"I need to know one thing," She states loudly, startling the crap out of me. My eyes go wide with worry. I have no clue what she's going to ask, and honestly, I'm almost scared to know. She starts to laugh at my reaction, but I clear my throat and nod for her to continue.

"Do you like my sister? If you do, then why are you constantly touching me or staring at me?"

Is that jealousy I'm detecting? My lips tip in a cocky smirk. "I like her, yes, as a friend. But Skye, you have been the one on my mind for a long time."

Finally reaching Skye's house, the motion sensors surrounding the home kick on, illuminating a rack full of surfboards. My fingers glide over the smooth surface. "I've never been surfing, but it looks like it would be a blast."

"Oh, this weekend there is a real surf competition. It seems Eli and Nina thought it'd be a good idea to sign me up. I don't know why, since I haven't competed in over a year, but we'll see what happens," She says with a nervous laugh. "Sorry, point is… I'd like you to come? Maybe? I don't know what it is about you Ian, but I seem to like you. I think. I don't know, things are so crazy right now."

I nod over-enthusiastically and pull her into my arms. We get lost in each other's gaze once again, but of course once again, someone has to ruin our moment.

"Are you coming?" Nina snaps from the door. We say goodnight, and I head back home to my house completely lost in my head.

She wants me to go to a surf competition with her?

I'm so fucking confused, but at the same time happy about her just acknowledging me for once. Talking to me and not being upset. Hell, she even admitted to liking me and then inviting me to this surf competition thing.

As I high-fin it out of there, I make a mental list of what I need to do for this.

Step one- Don't be a fucking creep.

Step two- Find out what a surf competition is and if this is a Human date. Is it a normal thing? Is this a joke?

Step three- Get rid of this raging boner that she no doubt saw as soon as she uttered the words, I like you.

After a short walk I get back to the safe house and shout it out, making both Kelby and Finnely rush to the door. "SHE INVITED ME TO A SURF COMPETITION!"

Maybe it was the beaming smile, or boner… probably both, or maybe it was the fact I was giddy like a three year old guppy eating his first clam, but they both laughed at my proclamation before I got a high-five from Kelby and a congratulations from Finnely. I pulled her into a hug and squeezed her shocked body before adding Kelby to the mix until we were all a laughing mess.

I pull back and put on my serious face. "Now, one of you tell me what the fuck a surf competition is."

My obliviousness gets a genuine tear-filled laugh from Kelby, and I have to kidney punch the bastard to make him stop. "What the fuck man, like you know what it is." I say before walking off to the kitchen where a fresh bowl of seaweed is waiting for me.

FUCK. YEAH.

I slurp it down, not even hearing them before the sound of a splash catches my attention, and I look over to find a bucket sitting by the back door. Live fish. Even better.

I pluck a grouper out of the bucket, letting my serrated teeth grow to their full length before biting deep into the thick part of it and ripping into it like the animal I am.

After I get my fill and a little energy back, Kelby puts me through Human school, and it irritates me that I'm the one in the dark about Human things, but I put all of that aside and pay attention. So far I've learned the contents of the living room: T.V.., couch, pictures, statue things for decorations.

Finnely laughs when I pick up something called a fire poker and swing it in the air as a sword. She explains how it moves the logs in the fire to "stoke" it. I just think the whole concept of a fireplace in a house that regulates the air from hot to cold on its own, is useful.

Once learning all of the menial Human things, we start getting into the topics that I am most interested in.

"Okay, so, I've heard a lot of the girls around town talking about guys sending them dick pics on their calls. The girls seem to be super excited about them, so I would suggest sending Skye a few of those." Kelby waves his call around while Finnely stares at him wide eyed and giggling to herself.

"Umm, did you happen to see any of them? I mean, should I be hard or floppy? I would hate to send the wrong one. I'm not ashamed of what I'm packing, but I'm far larger when I'm sporting wood."

My cheeks pink a bit having this conversation in front of Finnely. I would kick her out but she's

helping me so much with understanding all of this Human stuff.

"Hard," they both exclaim at the same time, then burst out laughing.

"Noted. What's next on the list?" I'm ready for the conversation about my cock to end.

Kelby heads into the living room, and we follow behind, then get comfortable as he sets up a laptop on the table near the couch and pulls up a website.

"This," Kelby says, waving his hand towards the screen, "is what Humans call porn." He hits a button and the sounds of moaning and screaming echo through the house originating from the speakers.

The girl on the video looks like she's shackled to the ceiling, her arms and legs pulled away from her body, and she stands there in an X position. The guy is wearing a pair of jeans and nothing else, with what looks like a shaped piece of wood in his hand. He keeps swatting at the girl on her ass, thighs, and everything else he can reach, and instead of crying, she's moaning and getting off on it.

Kelby pauses the video and points at the thing in the guy's hand. "That is called a paddle. Women love pain with their pleasure, and from what research I've done, those and floggers give the maximum effect. I've already started collecting a few things here and there for you. They are in a trunk in your room. There's also an anal plug, a ball gag, handcuffs and much more. If you need to know what to do, just pull up this site, and you can watch how they are used."

After watching an hour of the video Kelby pulled up, I close out the screen and adjust my hard-on, knowing that I'll have to take care of that later.

Finnely takes over the computer from there and is helping us search the meaning of, surf competition. I knew what surfing was. I'd watched her do it a million times, but there was a whole system to how it worked, and then the competition was against other surfers for points.

She said she was involved in it, and while I feel stoked she asked me to go with, it still confused me how she went from standoffish to now inviting an acquaintance with her to something like this after a couple days. I'm not sure what to think about it and Kelby doesn't either. It's an opportunity to get closer to her and get to know her. I'm happy, but suspicious.

If this isn't a date, what was it?

"So, maybe you should go then?"

Kelby scratches the back of his head before shrugging with an unsure look on his face, "I don't know man, I'm thinking I'll stay behind with Nina and make sure she's okay."

I raise an eyebrow at him in question, and he shrugs again. "I don't know, she's sick, and if something happens, Skye might want to know right?"

I'm calling BS on the excuse to stay, but I'm not going to twist his arm to interrupt alone time with Skye. I saw the way he looked at Nina. It was similar to the way he looks at Finnely, but… deeper. More concentrated.

"Right. Just don't fuck her sister, okay?"

He scoffs out a laugh before giving me the royal salute. "You can count on me, sire."

That gets him a punch to the gut that leaves him coughing and wheezing on the floor, calling me a little bitch.

I just chuckle and leave him there. Now that I know what the event is, I need to make sure I'm dressed right for it. "Finnely! I need clothes!" I holler out, and she comes running around the corner and almost slips in her hurry, making me laugh.

I felt better with these two walking me through the steps, getting me the right clothes and everything, but something was still nagging me.

Could this be too good to be true?

Skye

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"Don't forget, after school, you're mine," Eli growls in my ear, making my core heat. Ever since giving in to what my body wants, I can't seem to keep his hands off me. Not that I mind much. I still feel a little guilty, but since meeting Ian, I'm beginning to feel as if this was meant to be.

"Don't push it, big guy. I'm not only yours, and you promised to behave," I gently scold, but I can't keep the grin from my face. He pouts, and I giggle. "But I promise to make some time for just us." He bends down to give me a quick kiss, and I know my cheeks are heating.

"I don't think I will ever get sick of kissing you," Eli says, and I nod. My thoughts exactly. I loved Brady, and I always will, but there is something about the way Eli kisses me…

"Eli!" Bonnie shouts from down the hall, stopping our conversation and more of those delicious kisses. I raise my brow, and he chuckles as we watch her almost faceplant while racing our way.

"What in the hell is she wearing?" I laugh and shake my head. I have no clue, but she looks like a demented Harley Quinn. She reaches us and shoots me a sneer, before batting her heavily makeuped eyes at Eli.

"I need you, desperately." My eyes pop at that, and Eli coughs, clearing his throat. A growl builds in my chest, but before I can let it out, she grabs his arm and almost begs. "I need your bat from your car. The girls want to do the viral TikTok dance, and I don't have a bat," she whines, and I swear my ears are bleeding.

Eli starts to talk to her, and I glance around for the other girls. Pearl is in the front singing about blowing someone at Microsoft, as Coral films them doing some weird dance. I snort and roll my eyes. And they call me a whore. Like, I'm sorry, I couldn't even make this shit up right now.

“I’m going to run Bonnie out to my car and get my bat. I don’t know what the hell is going on, but she seems upset.” He leans down and kisses me hard before winking and running off down the hall.

But instead of following, Bonnie stays where she is, letting Eli go retrieve what she desperately needs and scowls. “Well played, Skye. Not only did you get away with killing your boyfriend, you stole his best friend out from under us.” I blanch, and she grins before skipping back to the gyrating, hypocritical hoes. I bite my tongue, grab my bag from the floor, and walk out to the parking lot.

We’re not supposed to leave for a few more hours, but I think playing hooky today is just what the doctor prescribed. I can’t wait to get out of this town and hit the waves. Plus, spending some one on one time with Eli and Ian sounds like heaven. I run into Eli, and he raises a brow at me. He has that bat in his hand, but I take it from him and lift it behind my head, wiggling my hips seductively just for him. He bites his lip, his eyes trailing along my body.

“Keep that up, Lil’ Mama, and we won’t make it to the hotel.” I stop and think for a second and shrug. Fuck it. I step closer to him and pull his lips to mine.

“Take me home, Eli,” I whisper in his mouth, and he growls, lifting me by the thighs. I wrap my legs around his waist and drop the bat. The metal clang should pull us apart, I mean that is his training bat, but he doesn’t care.

“Yo,” someone whistles, and we each groan before pulling apart. Eli sets me onto my feet, and I hold his shoulders for balance. Damn that boy can kiss. He gives me a smirk, and I know this isn’t over. His eyes leave mine and look over my shoulder. He gives me a worried glance before running his hands through his messy hair.

“Hey, Sam, what’s up?” he says before fist bumping his friend. My shoulders stiffen, and I wait for some nasty remark. Sam has never been overly cruel, but he is still in that group with the Sea Skanks.

“Hey, Skye, how’ve you been?” I turn and give him a glare; he steps back and sighs. “Listen, I know I’m an asshole. Truth is, after everything with Brady, I should have stepped up and been a better friend.” He rubs the back of his neck sheepishly as his cheeks redden. “So yeah, um, I’m kinda sleeping with Bonnie. Don’t tell anyone, but it’s been going on for a while now.” My eyebrows rise at that, and Eli coughs, trying to hide his laugh.

Sam groans and won’t look me in the eyes. “Pearl made her be mean to you, and in addition, I had to do the same. I know I’m a total pansy, but I think I love her.” I cut him off because honestly after how Bonnie has been towards me, I don’t care. I step back, and Eli wraps me in his arms, tight.

“Do you think I killed Brady?” I ask him point blank, and he starts to choke, sputtering out ‘no, you would never.’ I roll my eyes and look at Eli from over my shoulder. He gives me a shrug and kisses my temple. I know that’s his way of telling me that whatever I decide to do, he will support me. I sigh and rub my eyes. I am so sick of all the drama.

“I just want you all to leave me alone, honestly. But I know you’re one of Eli’s besties, and if things are going to continue with us, we need to get along.” He steps closer, and I step back, forcing Eli to move too. He stops and gives me a sad look.

“I am sorry, Skye.” Someone shouts from across the parking lot and rushes our way.

“Dude, have you seen what’s going on in there? Some freshman girls decided to do that TikTok dance the same as Pearl, and they are having a screaming cat fight. Cartier is trying to break that shit up. It’s fucking epic.” Aron reaches us and takes a breath, trying to stop laughing. Sam and him start to chat, and I look back at Eli.

“Take me away.” He gives me a smirk and nods before pulling me towards my Jeep.

We crash into my bedroom door, and I'm thankful it's the middle of the day so no one is home. Dad took Nina to the doctor, and Bash is with the sitter since Arielle is working at Oceanic. She has been a godsend helping us all out lately.

Eli kicks the door closed and tosses me on to the bed. I land on a squeaky toy and laugh as I grab it out from under me. I toss it on the dresser and reach the hem of my top, gripping it and tugging it over my head. Hands grip my hips, and I know Eli is as eager as me to get me naked.

He pulls my shorts off, groaning at finding me bare. Looking up at me, I shrug and bite my lip. I was running late this morning so I didn't bother, and now I'm happy I didn't.

He kisses my stomach and moves down to my thighs, ignoring the place I really want him. I whimper, shifting my hips, urging him to stop his teasing. He laughs and blows along the path he's now making with his tongue.

"Patience Skye, last night I only got a taste. Now I want the whole meal." My eyes roll back as a moan leaves my lips. He already knows what his dirty talk does to me.

"Please," I beg, and he growls, nipping my inner thigh before finally giving me what I want. Quickly moving his tongue back and forth, I hold my breath at the tingles running through my spine. I grip his hair and tug him up to my lips, licking the juices off, then take his mouth in a hard kiss. He groans, moving his hands down and thrusts two fingers into my soaked pussy. My back arches, and he moves from my mouth to my neck, kissing until he reaches my ear.

"Is this what you want, babe?" he growls in my ear as my body trembles. He looks back up into my eyes. His caramel gaze heated with fire. "My fingers filling your tight pussy as you squeeze them, coating them in your cum? Or do you want my thick cock ramming you into the mattress?"

I whimper and nod. His nostrils flare, and he pulls away from me to quickly undress. I watch as every inch of him is revealed to me. God, he's so hot. Cut and toned in all the right places, and his arms.

Ugh, I love his arms. How strong and firm they are. How when he holds me I feel safe. His cock springs free and I swallow. He's big. Bigger than what I'm used to, and it's been a really long time since anything has entered my sea cave. I snort at that thought, and he looks at me in shock.

"Is something funny, babe?" I shake my head and groan.

"No, you're just massive, and I'm tiny," I utter, and his eyes flare as he gives me his cocky smirk.

"Don't worry, I'll go slow."

"Oh no, mister. It's my turn." I sit up and flip him to his back, kissing away his gasp. When I pull away, his eyes are glazed, and he seems in a trance. I like him like this, submissive and at my mercy.

"Now, I really wanna know something," I mumble along his collarbone. He shivers and I smile.

"Okay," he chokes out as I grip his dick, rubbing the tip with my thumb.

"I've been curious. Tell me about you and Brady. I know you never went very far, but what would you have done if you could have?" I kiss along his throat, and he sighs, taking my cheeks in his hands. He brings my eyes to his, looking deep for my truth. I nod, and he releases me.

"Brady just had this energy about him. Something that would draw you in. His smile, laugh, kiss." His cheeks pink, and I move my hand up and down as he grows harder. "I don't know what we would have become, but I do know that I've had many nights picturing you like this with him too. Sharing

you. Fighting over who could make you come the most." I squeeze him, and he groans. "I wonder if maybe someone else will fulfill these fantasies now?"

I moan at the thought of that and move down his chest, making sure to cover every inch in my kisses.

"You like the thought of that? Me and him teasing you until you can't take anymore?" I whimper and move lower, now trailing my tongue between his abs. When I reach his hard cock, he growls and bucks his hips into the air. I pull back and bite my lip.

"Skye, I'm not going to last if you keep that up. I have been waiting a long time to feel your hot mouth and pouty lips wrapped around my dick." *God, his dirty talk.* I whimper and lean down, licking a long swipe along the underside of his cock.

"That feels so good, baby. Just like that," he praises as I grip him and swirl the tip. He bucks his hips again, and I fight not to laugh. I'm having fun teasing him. When I feel he's had enough, I bob up and down before swallowing him whole.

"Holy– Skye," he shouts before ending with a groan. He grips my hair, pulling me off and I pout.

"Don't give me that look. I'm fighting not to come right now." I lean up and press a kiss to his lips, then move down his jaw to his ear.

"Don't fight it Eli, we have time for round two," I whisper, and he growls, flipping me to my back and getting on top.

"You're killing me, babe." I give him a smile and he pauses. "So beautiful. A true gift from the sea goddess herself, and mine." I laugh as he takes my lips, kissing me with all the love and passion he's had to keep hidden. I give in as he moves my thighs, wrapping them along his waist. He pulls back, gazing into my eyes with a question.

"Do we need anything? I'm clean." I think about it for a moment. I should be smart after already being a single mother, but I have an IUD, and I trust Eli. I shake my head, and he groans loudly before shoving his head into the crook of my neck, thanking someone. It's mumbled and hard to understand. I grip his short blond curls and tug his head up, pulling his attention back to me.

He gives me a sheepish smile before bringing his lips back to mine. Kissing me soft and slow, tangling his tongue with my own. I whimper and grind against him. He growls against my lips and reaches down to grip his dick, sliding it through my wetness.

I moan as he starts to enter me slowly. Not moving his lips from mine, his hips shift as he grinds deeper. I pull away to take some shuddering breaths in and he groans, "Fuck, you feel amazing. So wet." I lift my hips up, moving at his pace.

"You make me so wet," I gasp, and he growls, moving faster and deeper. I grip his back with my nails, pulling him closer with one hand and wrap my other hand around his shoulder, using it for balance as I grind against him.

"Right there. So close." My spine arches as fireworks shoot through my body. The way he's grinding hits my clit in just the right spot, and it only takes two more thrusts to have me clenching him hard and gasping as my juices run down my butt cheeks.

"Shit," he groans loudly, following me over the cliff. He collapses on top of me for a moment, and I run my nails down his back, smiling at his trembles.

"Oh wow," I pant, rolling over onto his chest as he slides off to the side of my bed, claiming the right side for himself. He smacks my butt and kisses my sweaty temple. We're quiet for a few moments just giving in to the afterglow. I think he's fallen asleep when he starts to talk.

"I always pictured our first time would be on the beach or in a car." I snort and adjust so I can look up at him.

“Beach sex isn’t as amazing as people think. Sand gets in places it should never be and causes issues.” He starts to laugh, and I raise my brow, while pursing my lips. When he calms down he pulls me back down onto his chest.

“I never meant to say that out loud, but good to know for the future.” I roll my eyes and lean over, stretching. A little moan escapes me, and he sighs, “Keep that up and we won’t be going to Tyrulia Cove.”

I swat his stomach, give him a quick kiss, then jump off the bed and walk towards my bathroom. I don’t bother looking over my shoulder. I know his eyes are glued to my ass.

“If you wash my back, I may be inclined to wash yours.” I leave the door open and pull the curtain to the side. Before the water is even on, he has me spun around with my back to the tile. He kisses me hard and lifts my legs, to wrap around his hips.

“Again?” I moan as he enters me slowly.

“Always. Now that I’ve had a taste, I’ll never want to stop. You’re my addiction, Skye Banks,” he growls, quickening his pace. I sigh and take his lips with mine once more, giving in to the way he makes my body come alive.

“So Nina isn’t coming after all,” I tell him after getting a weird text from my dad. “It seems she has mono.” He chuckles, and I give him a look.

“Who has she been kissing?” I shake my head at his dumb boy ignorance and walk to my bed, still in my towel.

“Mono is not from kissing. Yes, it can be a factor, but it’s not the main cause. If you ask me, it's all the stress and overworking herself lately,” I finish with a sigh.

“So, Ian…” he trails off and I nod.

“Yeah, I’m still not sure what to think about him. I’m hoping this trip will help. He’s still super weird and according to Nina, he has a zero grade average, which is odd in itself. That’s why she’s been tutoring him.” I turn and give him a hug. “This weekend will you help me? I need to figure out more about him and who he is. Where he came from. Don’t ask me why. I just have this feeling…” I step back and wave my hand before spinning and grabbing his clothes. I toss

them his way and wait for him to get dressed.

“Yeah, Skye, I’ll help you. I agree there's something off about him.” He pulls me into another steamy kiss, and I groan before pushing him away.

“Okay, you need to leave before my family gets home and Bash is dropped off. I want to spend some time with him. I’m nervous about leaving for a whole weekend.” I press one more kiss on his lips, then shove him into the hallway. I need to get dressed and pack. Nina will be home soon with my dad. Arielle is watching Bash this weekend, and I’m a neurotic mess. I have never spent a night apart from him.

I throw some comfy clothes on and toss my hair into a messy bun. The front door opens, and I rush out to meet my dad and Bash. He picked him up on his way home so we can have dinner together. Mashed peas for him and a salad for me. My stomach is in knots, and I don’t think I could eat anything else.

Nina shuffles out of my way and goes to her room, closing the door. I think she's still upset with me about Ian not liking her. I asked her about it, and she said it's fine, but still. She has never been boy crazy, so for her to have a crush is a big deal.

My dad walks into the kitchen and steals a bite of my salad from my fork. I must have been lost in thought. He makes a gagging sound and walks over to the fridge. He opens the door and groans, "Why, why does that girl hate me?"

I snort and wipe a bit of peas off Bash's chin, then stand and quickly clear my plate. I lean closer to my dad and whisper, "There are cookies in the pantry." He turns to me and presses a kiss to my temple.

"This is why you're my favorite." I laugh, and he gives me a big grin, rubbing his hands together excitedly. He grabs the cookies, looking over his shoulder for Nina, then shuffles backwards towards the door, hiding the cookies.

Before he leaves he faces me seriously. "I love Elliot, but if that boy doesn't respect you and wear a condom, I will not be held responsible for burying him in the sand." My mouth drops open and I blink.

"Noted," I choke out, not going to confess what I just did earlier. He nods and gives me a soft smile.

"I love you, baby girl, and I am so proud of you. For everything you have been through this last year. Have fun this weekend, but be safe, okay? I may joke, but I really am still young here." I rush his way and wrap him in a tight hug. He wraps one arm around me, keeping the cookies still hidden.

Gah, he is such a dork, but he's my dork.

"I love you, Dad. Thank you." His shoulders shake, and he clears his throat before pulling away and walking out the door.

I PACK Bash's bag and give him a quick bath. He is smelling fresh and in his PJs for Grandma. I know she's capable, but this is my first time leaving him, and I just want to spend more time with him.

We walk past Nina's room and I pause. I really need to talk to her. I can't leave thinking she's upset with me. I stop and look at Bash. "Act cute, she won't ever turn you away," I whisper quietly as he just blinks at me. I take a deep breath and knock.

"Go Skye, I'm sick," she yells through the door.

"I know, I just wanted to say goodbye and Bash here wants to, too." A moment later the door opens.

"Be quick, I don't want you to get sick, or Bash."

I keep my distance and quickly start talking before she can kick us out. "I know you don't feel good, and I'm sorry you can't come, but I just need to know are we okay? I couldn't handle it if you're upset with me." I look to the floor, and she sighs.

"Yes, I was upset at first, but honestly, I think Ian was just hanging out with me to get more info on you. He would act like he didn't know any of the questions I would ask him, then he would ask something about you or Bash." I pause at that.

"I can't explain it, sis, and I have Eli. I should just say no and push Ian away, but inside I feel as

though he's meant for me too. Gah, I know it's dumb." I laugh awkwardly, and she sniffles, moving to sit on her bed.

"It's nice to hear you talk about someone other than Brady, Skye. If Ian and Elliot are the ones to bring you back to me and out of your slump, then I am happy you have them. Now I need to lie down, and Arielle should be here soon for Bash. Are you ready for your first weekend away?"

I shake my head so fast I feel a little dizzy.

"Not even a little. I don't know if I can do this Nina. What if he needs me? Oh god, I should just stay home. This is a bad idea. Why did I let you talk me into this?" Nina sighs, getting up from her bed. She steps a little closer, but still keeps her distance.

"Skye, this is the next step of your healing. You need to get back out there and do things you love. Spend time with people besides family. Be young, wild and free. We're only young once, and you have had a lot happen in your nineteen years." I sniffle and wipe my eyes. Then snuggle my little miracle tighter. He babbles, and I can't help but laugh through my tears.

"I'm not nineteen, yet." Nina rolls her eyes and waves us from the room.

"I love you, Skye. Always. Try and have fun this weekend. But Dad was right." I give her my attention, and she has a twinkle of mischief in her eyes. "Condoms. Lots of condoms." I reach into Bash's overnight bag and toss a diaper at her. She breaks out in a fit of giggles that turn to coughs. I frown, and she gives me a reassuring smile before shutting her door.

"THERE IS MY PRECIOUS LITTLE CRAB," Arielle says, coming through the front door as I pack another diaper. Bash is in his baby seat and already passed out. I stand and give her a quick hug.

"I am never going to hear the end of calling him Sebastian after the *Little Mermaid* am I?" I say with a small laugh. Her eyes flash and she grins.

"Darling, you have no idea how fitting that name is." I cock my head at that, and she gives me a wink. "Are you all packed and ready to go?" she asks, glancing at my slouchy clothes.

I nod, and she sighs before moving to the couch and taking a seat. She pats the spot beside her.

"Come sit for a moment." I hesitate, but my feet move and soon, I'm sitting. She places an arm around my shoulders and gives me a small hug. "Big changes are happening Skye, and I know that it can be scary, but it can also be magical. Brady would be so happy knowing you're happy and moving on. You know that right?" I wipe my eyes and nod again. My voice is non-existent as I choke back a sob. Does she know what Eli and I did today?

"I just don't want him to look down on me and be upset. Upset that I'm falling in love with someone besides him. We promised each other forever."

I wipe my nasty nose on my sleeve and cringe. I slowly shift for her to let me go and stand, moving over to the coffee table for a tissue. Two hormonal teenagers in one house, we have tissues on every surface.

I turn back towards Arielle, but she's looking out the window at the waves, a distant, longing expression on her face. I don't think I've once seen her in the water. I asked Brady once, and he said she was terrified and couldn't swim.

"What was Brady like as a baby? Was he as calm as Bash? Or was he a little sea monster?" She

seems open right now for a chat. Usually she's busy, or I'm in a rush.

Her eyes snap back to mine and she smiles. "He was a little of both. I raised him alone as you know. So he had his moments. He could be completely sweet, a total mommy's boy. But goodness, he would have the biggest tantrums. I remember once he packed a little suitcase and said he was running away. I made him some snacks and sent him on his way."

She laughs and wipes her eyes. I reach over and grab her a tissue. She takes it with a small smile. "He didn't last an hour. He told me a mean little girl tackled him and stole his fish crackers." I freeze at that and think back to that day. A laugh escapes, and I shake my head.

"He knocked on our door and walked right in, bragging about his snacks and that Nina and I couldn't have any. He was such a little bully. I chased him out the back door and mashed his face in the sand." Bash coos, and I look at him with wonder. Will he be more like me or his dad?

"I told him if he wanted a snack he could have a '*sand*wich,' my dad yelled at me and sent me to my room." I was so mad at him. But the next day, he came to school with fishies to share, and all was good again.

She moves over to Bash and runs a finger along his cheek. He reaches up in his sleep and steals it, holding it tight. "He would have been an amazing father. We're lucky, even though it wasn't the best of circumstances, we will always have a piece of him. He'll never be forgotten."

She stands and moves closer to me, cupping my cheek. "You are an amazing young woman, Skye. There is greatness inside of you, just waiting to come out. Don't shy away from it anymore, honey. Live your life." I wrap my arms around her tight and thank her. She starts to hum a tune I'm familiar with, and I start to sing it with her. When I pull away to give Bash a kiss goodbye, I swear her eyes flash purple. But I blink, and it's gone. I shake my head and rub my eyes.

Lights pull in the driveway, and I sigh, bending down to grab Bash's seat, I place him on the couch. "I love you my little miracle. I will Facetime with you every day. Two times a day. You be good for Grandma." Arielle laughs and gently shoves my bag against my chest.

"Go Skye, we will be fine." I nod and step towards the front door. Eli is walking up the steps. I give him a big smile, and he gives me one in return. I take one more look at Bash and nod.

It's time. I'm going to have an amazing weekend with Eli, get to know Ian better, and maybe win a competition. Arielle is right. Brady would want this, and if he was able to, he would be by my side cheering me on along the way. I close my eyes and open the door, taking a breath.

I'll always love you, Brady. I open my eyes and take Eli's hand.

Elliot

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I leave Skye's house relaxed and in an amazing mood. I finally got the girl of my dreams. Even if I do have to share her with some asshole, who I'm still not one hundred percent sold on. There is just something fishy about him. Like where the hell did he come from? Why is he here? Why is he so obsessed with my girl?

I shake my head and pull into the parking lot of *Henry's*– a grocery store here in the cove. There are a few things I want to grab for our trip. One thing is her snacks; Skye is the hangriest woman I've ever met. And I know after the workout I put her through today, she's going to be hungry.

I walk inside, letting the cool air chill me. I grab a cart and run through my mental list. We still have a few hours since she wanted to spend some time with Bash before we left, but I want to get in and out as fast as possible. Bonnie is working the register, and after this morning, I do not want her drama. I slip by her as she's talking with Susan, one of my mom's friends, then toss a few bags of Skittles, some spicy Cheetos, a premade sub, and a few drinks in the cart.

I walk over to the cooler and snatch a bag of frozen, cooked shrimp too. It's odd for a road trip, but it's one of her favorite things to munch on. She doesn't even need them thawed.

"Hey, handsome." Bonnie sidles up next to me and runs her nail down my arm. I close my eyes and sigh. *I was so close!*

I gently shove her off and move over to checkout. Pam is now on register so it looks like Bonnie is on her break. Just my luck.

"Hi, Bon, I don't have time to chat right now. I need to go home and pack, then swing by and grab that new kid before heading to Tyrulia Cove." She sniffs and looks off at the coolers.

"I never see you anymore, ever since you started hanging out with *her*," she says in a snarky tone, so I ignore her whining and lay my items on the belt. Pam gives me a bright smile, and I return it.

"Hi there, handsome."

"Hey, Pam. How are you and Phil doing?" I listen as she chatters away about her husband needing new tires on his boat trailer and her grandson catching his first fish. Bonnie is stewing beside me, but I warned them all yesterday. If they keep talking badly about Skye, I wouldn't give them the time of day.

"How old is your grandson again?" I can't remember, but I think he's only a year or two old. Is that too soon to take him fishing? I'd love to take Bash out on the boat. Just like Brady and I used to do. Maybe I can show him some of our favorite spots.

"E, seriously! Did you line your hook with crack or something? That is the tenth fish in a row you've caught." I roll my eyes and ignore Brady's pouting. Even if he is adorable and I wish I could lean over and press my lips to his. His phone rings, and he sighs before checking it. His eyes bug, and he rubs the back of his neck. I lean over and look.

"Damn, when will the girl get the memo? She is so jealous of Skye, it's not even funny anymore. I'm waiting for her to show up naked in your bed or something." I mutter, and he deletes the photo of Pearl before glancing my way.

"Bonnie isn't any better, and I tried to tell Skye, but she just laughed and said her friends would never betray her like that."

"She's too kind. One day she will see what we see." He leans over and presses his shoulder against mine, then steals my fishing pole. "We're switching poles. I can't have you bragging to everyone that you got the most fish."

"He's one and a half and a handful," Pam says, bringing me back to the present. I give her a grin and offer up my card to pay.

"We will have to have a playdate once Sebastian is up and running too," I reply and a scoff behind me has me turning my glare to Bonnie. She gives me wide innocent eyes and a sultry smile before batting her lashes. I snort and look back to Pam as she hands me my card and receipt.

"That would be wonderful, he is such a little cutie. Cal had him in a chest carrier the other day at the diner. He looks just like his daddy, God rest his soul." I nod and quickly say goodbye, then take my bags out to the car. I don't know how Skye does this. But that one comment made my heart break, and my eyes fill with tears.

I drive home and think about what we can do this weekend at Tyrulia Cove. I know Skye will want to hit some of the shops on the pier and go to the aquarium. We haven't been in a few years. Maybe we can come back and take Bash soon. I wonder what Ian will want to do. I suggested we all ride together since he's new, but really, I want to keep an eye on him. Skye is suspicious, which I get. I don't want some weirdo near Bash either.

"Oh honey, I'm glad I caught you. I wanted to say goodbye before you left." My mom comes bustling in the house, tossing her bag on the couch and rushing to give me a big hug. I drop my soda on the table and wrap her up tight.

"I'm only going to be gone for two nights, Mom," I grumble as she starts to fuss over me. Making sure I packed everything and asking if I needed any money, snacks, sandwiches for the long drive. "Hey, chill. It's two hours, and I already grabbed some snacks." I say with a laugh, stopping her from getting ingredients from the fridge. "Is everything okay?" She stops and gives me a sad sigh.

"We will talk when you get back. Just have some fun this weekend. You kids are growing up so fast. Skye is already a mom, you're going to be graduating this year and going to college. Time is just moving too fast." I move around the counter and pull her into another hug.

"I love you, Mom," I whisper into her hair. She gives me one more tight squeeze, then pushes away.

"What time are you supposed to get Skye? It's almost seven now. You don't want to arrive at the hotel too late." *Shit!*

"Umm, now. I still have to pick up Ian, the new guy from school, then grab Skye." I pull my phone out and send him a quick message. Skye gave me his number earlier, and I'm glad she did. I have no clue where he lives. An address pops up on my screen and I laugh. Of course he lives in the mansion on top of the cliff.

I arrive at his house with ten minutes to spare. I hope Skye is ready to go, Mom was right. The hotel is going to be packed with surfers, and I don't want to deal with bullshit at check in.

His friend comes out with him and is that a servant? Who the hell is this guy? I climb out and open the trunk for his bag. A tiny minnow of a woman rushes forward and places it in. She avoids my eyes and bows her head to Ian. He and his orange-haired friend talk for another minute before he turns and walks back into the house. Ian steps closer to climb into my car, but I side-step him.

"Listen, I know we've had our differences in the past, but I'm willing to move past them for Skye and Bash's sake. That said, if you ever do anything to hurt her or that little boy, I will not be afraid to go to prison for the rest of my life."

He gives me a smirk and I scowl. "You don't get it. I don't know where you came from, but you should be kissing my feet right now. Skye is mine and always will be. The fact that I'm even considering sharing the woman of my dreams still baffles me. But I will do anything for her. Even let her date some spoiled rich prick."

He steps closer to me and puffs his chest up, but I roll my eyes. "I'm not looking for a fight, Ian. I just want what's best for my girl. She's been through hell recently, and she doesn't need more bullshit and drama. Just drop the asshole attitude, and we won't have any issues."

"All I've ever wanted was to meet the girl who dominated the waves. The one who caught my attention. I never planned to hurt her. I just want to make her smile. Take that pain and grief away from her. She's too kind to be broken."

I pause at that and give him a deep look. He seems to be telling the truth. His ocean-blue eyes glow with affection, and it's the first time since meeting him he's let his guard down and dropped the cocky persona. If he keeps this up, I may start to build a crush just as Skye has.

I clear my throat and nod, then step away from the car door so he can climb in. “Good, I’m glad we had this talk,” I grumble before moving to my door and climbing into the driver's seat.

We don’t talk anymore until I pull into Skye’s driveway. “Do you want to just run in and get her?” I ask him but he shakes his head.

“No, I don’t think we are at that stage yet.” I raise my brow at him, and he runs a hand down his face. He looks tired. Like something is weighing on his mind. “I don’t think she would like me just walking into her house.”

“You have a lot to still learn, bro. Skye is one of the most laid back people you will ever meet. I don’t think they even lock their door,” I say with a laugh before getting out.

I walk up the steps, and Skye opens the door, stepping outside. Her eyes are watery but she gives me a big smile. I glance over her shoulder to Arielle on the couch wiping her eyes.

“Hey Lil’ Mama, are you ready to go?” She hands me her bag and nods. I take her hand and lead her to the car. I don’t know what just went down inside, but it must have been something big. I’ll ask her later. We get to my car, and I kiss her quickly before holding her door.

“Hey Ian,” Skye says, climbing into the passenger seat. “I’m glad you could make it.” He gives her a big smile, and she pauses, caught in his eyes. Seriously, what is it with them? I lean over and buckle her in, pressing a quick kiss to her temple. She sighs, turning and relaxing into me. I glance Ian’s way, and he has a strange look on his face, but he gives me a smile when he notices me staring. I blink away the weirdness from getting caught in his gaze too and shut her door. I climb in on my side, and the radio kicks on when I turn the key. Skye bops along to the melody and starts to hum.

“So, what music do you like? It’s about a two hour drive so I suggest we all take turns,” she asks Ian, and he looks down at his phone, typing something before glancing into the mirror where I’m watching him. A look of panic flashes in his eyes.

“I like Batman?” he replies as if it were a question, then grumbles something, but it’s too quiet for me to make out.

“Oooh me too, what’s your favorite one?” Skye says excitedly, and I roll my eyes. She is such a nerd sometimes. But seriously, umm when did Batman become music?

“The Dark…” he trails off, and I cut in.

“Yeah, *The Dark Knight*. Heath Ledger was amazing,” I say with a sad sigh. *Gone too soon*.

“Yes, that’s what it was. Sorry it’s been a while,” he finishes.

“I completely understand, lately, if it doesn't have some singing cartoon crab, or bright, vivid colors, I don’t watch it,” she says with a small laugh.

“Crabs don’t sing. They chatter non stop, but they have awful…” Ian trails off and my eyes widen. He starts to laugh then says, “Got ya. You think I’m crazy now, huh?”

I glance over at Skye, and she looks back at me with her eyebrow raised, like “see.” I nod, and she relaxes back into the seat.

“If I thought you were crazy Ian, I never would have invited you,” Skye says with a little purr to her voice, glancing in the back seat at him. My hands clench on the steering wheel, and I take a deep breath. I can do this. This is what she wants. I need to stop being a jealous asshole.

“So, what sports do you like to play?” I bark out loudly, making them jump. I clear my throat then repeat myself quieter.

“Oh, well…” I wait for his answer while he hem and haws. I mean it’s not that complicated of a question. “Oh!” he exclaims, making me jump. “I like the game that you play with a ball and a stick.” I glance at him in the mirror. It’s starting to get dark, and the shadows covering his face make his eyes kind of glow.

“Huh,” I grunt. “Which one? There are like five sports with a ball and stick.” I glance over at Skye, but she shrugs.

“Do you mean golf? Or lacrosse? Oh, I know! You must mean baseball.” Skye gives me a big smile, and I stick my tongue out at her. She bites her lip, and I shift my hips, bringing my eyes back to the road.

“Yeah, baseball. The most American game there is,” Ian mutters, and I once again shake my head. Is this guy for real? “I love swimming, though. I’m thinking of joining the team. Think maybe you could put in a good word for me?” he asks me, and I freeze. Him in a speedo, swimming beside me. *No, bad Elliot!* I mumble something, I’m not sure what, but it seems to make him happy.

“Wait. I thought you were afraid of the water. You always avoid it.” Skye turns to face him, and he starts to laugh.

“I have been swimming in the sea since I was born. I could live in it.” I snort at that and nod. I feel the same. I love being in the water.

“So, how is it you have never been surfing then?” Skye continues to question him, and I am starting to get more and more confused.

An hour later, Skye starts to grumble, and I know I better feed the beast before it wakes. I hand Skye the bag of snacks, and she does a little squeal. “Oh, I could just kiss you right now.” I lean over and offer my cheek to her, and she giggles. I love the sound of that. The moment we left Kelly Cove and hopped on the interstate, her mood improved exponentially. I know that she’s planning to leave this town for good, and I had been hoping to change her mind but I don’t know… Maybe it is what’s best for her. I know she will miss her family, but it’s not like they can’t visit. I only hope she takes me with her.

Ian grunts from the backseat, and I turn quickly, giving him a look. He’s going to have to get over me showing Skye PDA. I have waited a long ass time. I go to say something but stop. He’s not looking at us, his eyes are on the bag of shrimp. I turn back to the road and nod towards the bag.

“Do you want some?” He groans obscenely, and tingles run down my spine, right to my semi-hard cock. Skye hands the bag out for him, and he doesn’t hesitate to shove a handful in his mouth, tails and all. I cringe with every chomp and fight not to be sick.

“A man after my own heart. I love shrimp too, minus the tails.” Skye tells Ian as he furrows his brow, spitting out one of the tails. He rolls the window down and chucks it. Skye laughs, and I roll my eyes.

“You guys can keep your fishy treat. I’ll dig into these cheese puffs.” Skye opens the bag for me and hands them over. I give her a quick kiss on the hand and place them on my lap.

“So, tell me more about this competition,” he leans closer to the middle of our seats, finishing his snack and turns his head towards Skye. Her breath hitches and I grunt.

“Sit back and buckle up. If we get in a wreck, you’ll go flying out the windshield.” He turns to face me and lifts a brow, giving me a cocky smirk, but he listens to what I said. Though his eyes hold a promise of retribution later. I adjust my cock and groan, glancing at my GPS. This is going to be a long drive.

Skye

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I checked my phone again, and she still hasn't replied to me. Like, I understand he's probably in bed, but she could send me a text back or a picture.

"He's fine, babe." Eli reaches over and takes my hand, and I sigh. I know he is, but I still don't like being this far away from him.

"Do you think maybe we could just stay the one night, and go back home after the competition?" He presses his lips to my knuckles and laughs.

"No, we will go home Sunday afternoon. This is good, Skye. Try to relax, and have fun this weekend, okay?" I sigh and nod.

"So, Ian, what is your favorite Disney movie?" I ask him with a yawn, trying to keep the conversation flowing. After everything Eli and I did today and that long talk with Arielle, I'm starting to get tired. How rude would it be if I just passed out on these guys?

"I don't know many Disney movies, but I like the one about my kingdom. I–I mean the underwater kingdom," he stutters, and I nod.

"That's Bash's current favorite and one of mine as well. I named him after Sebastian. I found it fitting since his grandmother's name is Arielle. Even if it is spelled differently." Eli laughs and glances my way.

"Don't let her fool you, man. She used to sing *Part of Your World* at the top of her lungs as she would lie on top of a rock and wait for a wave to splash behind her. Brady was always Prince Eric, and I was the fishy best friend," he grumbles, and I laugh. I had forgotten about that.

"Oh, don't be such a guppy," I tease, and he laughs. "I miss those days," I whisper, and he sighs.

"Me too."

Ian gets quiet again, and I take the moment of silence to lean back on the leather seat and listen to the music.

I start to drift off as they speak softly.

"Skye, wake up. We're here." A familiar voice pulls me from my nap. A memory flashes from one of my worst nights. When someone saved my life.

"Skye, as much as I'd like to have you in my arms right now, people may accuse me of being a predator if I were to carry you inside comatose." I blink my eyes open and smile. Ian is there with his palm on my cheek. I laugh quietly.

"You say the oddest things," I whisper, and he smiles, leaning down as if he's going to kiss me.

"Okay, love birds. We are all checked in. Skye, you're with me, and Ian, you have the room adjoining ours," Eli says as Ian steps back, releasing me with a sigh.

"Later. I'd like to continue this?" he asks, and I nod. He offers me his hand, and I unbuckle, then take it.

Eli comes over and gives me a smirk once I'm standing by the trunk. He leans over and kisses me, and I laugh against his lips.

"You did that on purpose." He shrugs and grabs our bags, handing Ian his. I take his hand and reach for Ian's. He seems surprised but takes it. I give him a wink, and he smiles. A real genuine smile, not those cocky smirks he always gives. I glance over at Eli, and he seems to be thinking hard about something. He shakes his head and leads the way to our rooms.

"What time will Meg be here with our boards?" Eli asks, and I stop moving. *Oh, I forgot my board. How am I going to compete? Wait, did he say Meg?*

"I don't know. I'll call her when we get inside. I can't believe I didn't notice it was gone. I think I'm nervous about tomorrow," I admit, and Ian squeezes my hand.

"I am excited to see what tomorrow brings. I've only ever seen a competition from afar," Ian comments, and Eli gets excited and starts to tell Ian about all the best things.

"It's a blast man, just wait. Beach bunnies in skimpy bikini–" I cut him a glare, and he has the foresight to let my hand go and look away. His neck reddens, and I bite my lip from laughing.

We reach our rooms, and Eli opens the door. There is a huge king sized bed along the back wall and a large T.V. I raise a brow at Eli and he smirks. I give him a grin and his nose scrunches.

I turn to face Ian, and he looks nervously at the room next to ours. His grip tightens on my hand almost to the point of pain. I know how he feels. I'm not ready to let go yet either.

"Hey, do you want to watch a movie? The three of us maybe?" I ask as he lets me go with a sigh. He looks exhausted, and I know my short nap didn't suffice, but I don't want it to be weird.

Eli and I going into a room together and leaving him on the outskirts. I still don't know where we stand, but I think this could maybe work. The three of us. I glance over at Eli, and he has a mischievous look on his face. He nods towards Ian, and I turn, walking into the room. I slip my flip-flops off and bounce on the bed.

"What movie?" Eli asks, following me onto the mattress. Ian shuffles his feet for a minute in the doorway before making a decision. The door shuts behind him with a soft, ominous click. I raise my brow as I wait for him to join us on my other side.

"How about something adult? Not Disney or cartoons. Maybe something with comedy. Oh, I know," I say with a laugh, and Eli groans beside me. He knows what's coming. "Let's watch *Deadpool*." Ian nods, and Eli immediately starts to argue.

"I knew it would be something with Ryan. She has a crush on him." Ian freezes and his fists

clench. I take his hand and rub my thumb over his knuckles, relaxing him. Eli snorts and puts the movie on.

"It's a harmless crush. I mean he would never go for me," I say with a scoff, and they both start talking over each other about how beautiful and amazing I am. I sit back and listen while watching one of the cutest actors alive.

I WAKE up wrapped in strong arms, and I sigh. The sun shines through the open curtains, and I feel happy.

"Good morning," Eli mumbles into the back of my head before kissing down my neck. I rub my ass back against his erection, and he groans. "As much as I would like to continue this, we need to be down on the beach in an hour to check in." I wiggle until I can face him. He gives me a sleepy smile, and I return it. His blond waves are all messy, and he has never looked more adorable.

"Hi," I whisper, and he laughs.

"Hi, Lil' Mama." I scrunch my nose at that, and he leans down to kiss it.

"I think I need a new nickname. I mean, yes, I am a mom, but not everyone in the world needs to know I'm a statistic. Nope," I cut him off. "I am not saying anything bad about teenage moms, and I love Bash more than life, but people do judge." He nods and leans back.

"I never thought of it like that." I lean over and kiss him.

"I love that you call me that. Just maybe not in public, okay?"

He growls before flipping me onto my back and kissing me hard. I get lost in the kiss when someone knocks. Eli pulls back with a groan, and I laugh. I flip the covers off and climb from the bed. Hands grip my hips and pull me back for one more kiss before a smack hits my ass. I yelp, and he laughs before shoving his face into my pillow.

I love him like this. Playful and cute. It reminds me of the old Eli. I reach the door as another knock comes and open it to a smiling Ian. He's wearing bright coral and purple board shorts and a white tank top. His muscles are on display, and I lick my suddenly dry lips. He's holding a tray of coffee, and I groan, then open the door wider and let him enter.

He hands me the tray, and I place it on the small table in the corner before moving over to the bathroom for a quick shower.

"I FEEL like twice in one week is a sign," Eric calls from his tent, and I stop and laugh. Eli grabs my hand and pulls me over there. Ian follows behind hesitantly. Eric seems to stand at attention the moment he spots Ian. I glance between the two. Do they know each other? Eric avoids his eyes almost as if he's cowering.

I think Eli notices the tension as well, and he quickly brings the conversation back.

“What are you doing all the way out here? I don’t see many kids on the beach today,” he jokes, and Eric smiles, breaking the weirdness. He shakes his head and waves over the surfers.

“I volunteered to be on call today in case anything goes down.” He turns towards me and gives me a wink. My cheeks flush, and my heart starts to race. Oh no. Not again. I step back and make some excuse to get away. Eli gives me a concerning look, but I wave him away.

“Stay and catch up. I’m going to show Ian around.”

“So, you know that guy?” Ian asks after we leave, glancing back as Eric and Eli shoot the shit. I nod and take his hand.

“Yeah, we grew up together. Brady, Eli, Eric, Nina, Meg and me. We all had a sort of surfing club I guess you could call it. He left a few years ago to go to medical school. I think he has a few more years to go.” Ian scoffs, and I stop walking. I turn towards him, and he has a frown on his lips. I open my mouth to ask what’s up, but he runs his hand through his dark hair and gives me a smile.

“So, this is what a competition looks like?” He glances around at all the pop-up tents and the large stage they have started to set up. I shrug and nod.

“It’s usually more crowded, but it’s still early. They will have sportscasters booths, and a few radio stations will be here too. They usually have a blow up bouncy castle for the kids and a few activities. One year, Nina won a gift certificate for completing the obstacle course first.” I laugh, remembering how smug she was about winning a twenty dollar prize. Brady was so upset. Claimed she cheated by kicking sand into his face.

This place holds a lot of memories. I’m glad we came. I know this is what Brady would have wanted.

Eli comes up from behind me and kisses my neck. Ian gives us a look of longing, and I know how he feels. I don’t know why he is holding back so hard. The only thing he seems to be comfortable with is holding my hand and the occasional hug.

“So, I may have done something.” Eli starts to talk when Meg pops up behind Ian’s shoulder; she has my board and is with one of her guy friends. I can't remember his name, but he has Eli’s board. My eyes trace my board and something is different. Meg has her arm over the center as if she is hiding something.

I move out of Eli’s arms and start to walk her way.

“Hey, girl, are you ready for today? These waves are hype.” I give her a smile and nod, but I don’t take my eyes off of my board. Eli comes after me and stands in between us.

“Skye, I need you to listen to me for a moment, okay?” I give him a nod and he continues.

“Brady was the one who got us into competing, and I know he would be here if he could.”

My hands start to shake, and he grabs one, holding it over his racing heart. “I know he’s going to be here today, watching over us as we dominate the surf. I wanted to do something so he would know that we're always thinking of him.” He steps away from Meg and drops my hand. She’s holding my board up right now, and my eyes instantly tear up.

Over the center of my dirty pink Salt Gypsy Shorebird is a quote in a beautiful script font. One that rips me apart and puts me back together again simultaneously.

“Though I’m gone, you're always in my soul.”

I stumble backwards and cover my mouth with my hand. Someone grabs me from behind and holds me to their firm chest. Sea salt and orange hits my nose, and I relax. Ian wraps his arms around my stomach tighter and whispers into my ear.

“I didn’t know Brady, but I wish I did. He sounds like someone worth knowing.” I nod and wipe my eyes.

“He was,” I whisper back. Meg and Eli are looking at me with worried looks on their faces, but I give them a smile. I step forward, and Ian lets me go.

I gently run the tips of my fingers over the inscription. “This is incredible. Thank you,” I whisper, and Eli brings me into a hug, kissing my temple. He hasn’t said the words yet, but in that moment, I know that he truly loves me, and I’m not far behind.

“ARE YOU READY FOR THIS, GIRL?” Meg asks me as we wait for the signal to start. I should have known we would be competing against each other. I give her a wink and pull the zipper up on my wetsuit. I don’t care for them, but regulations and all that.

The horn sounds and off we go. I grip my board tight and settle over top it as we duckdive in through the waves to get to the calm waters. I straddle my board and take a minute to just bask in the warmth of the sun. I open my eyes to a perfect swell, but I don’t go for it. I know there is one even better coming. The vibrations under the water touching the leggie around my ankles, promises me a boomer around the corner, and I am so ready for it. I watch as Meg takes full advantage, pulling off a perfect Aerial. Damn, that's going to give her some good points.

She comes back my way, and we bob in the waves for a few minutes. I know we have about twenty minutes left, but I’m not going to rush. I smile as a set comes in. I glance at Meg, and she gives me the nod. I shoot her a wink before turning my board and getting ready.

“Get it, girl!” she shouts as the boomer I was waiting for swoops me up, and I paddle hard. I jump up and balance on the back end before getting to the center. I bend my knees and perform a perfect Punt before ending in a barrel.

I glance beside me into the sea, and I could swear I see purple eyes flash behind the wall of water. I gently shake my head and blink, almost losing my balance.

When I open my eyes, they are gone. I focus on the tube and smile when I come to the break. I ride the waves into shore and don’t bother going back out even though we still have some time on the clock. That was perfect, and I don’t want to jinx anything.

I reach the shallow waters and scoop up my board, carrying it towards my awaiting fanbase. Eli had his ride earlier and did awesome. He nailed a perfect 360 and tried for a snap, but the waves got the best of him. Not that you could tell, he had the biggest grin on his face when he came back in, and the kiss he gave me was enough to have spectators commenting.

I rush into a group hug of people congratulating me. Eli grabs my board, shoving it into the sand before scooping me up into a spin. I haven’t won anything yet, but I know with that killer performance, I’m a shoo-in for placing in the top three.

The horn blares, declaring time’s up, and I wait for Meg to come meet me so we can get our scores. “Babe, I bow down to you. That was a sick ass Punt. Bitch, I am so jealous.” Meg drops to her knees jokingly, and I know my cheeks are dark red. Everyone laughs so I do a pretend curtsy.

The announcers step up to the mic, and I grab Meg’s hand, squeezing nervously. I hold my breath as my name is called.

“With an amazing score of eighteen, the winner of the Tyrulia Cove Competition in the women's category this year is Skye Banks.”

My ears ring with all the yelling and cheering that comes from behind me. I walk up onto the stage to get my winnings, and then a few sponsors pull me aside to chat. I take some cards, but I know that professional surfing isn't my dream.

I turn to find all my friends standing there with big grins, and my cheeks hurt from how much I'm smiling. I feel as if I may explode. I'm practically vibrating with excitement. I step up to Eli and pull him into a tight hug.

"Thank you, Eli. I didn't know how much I needed this, but you did. You always know what I need." I give him a kiss as a photographer takes my picture. He releases me, and I turn towards Ian. He gives me a big smile.

"Congratulations, Skye. That was incredible. The way you moved along the waves." I duck my head a little to hide my blush, and he grabs me into a hug. My skin tingles as if I was just shocked, and I groan. He mumbles something before letting me go. I wish he wouldn't.

"Okay mister, it's your time now!" I tell Ian as he watches the last surfers leave the water. The waves are calmer now, and the perfect time to get him in for his first lesson.

He looks hesitant but nods, then gives me a huge grin. I grip his wrist and pull him towards Eli's board. This is going to be so much fun!

I LAUGH as Ian groans again, slipping off the board. "Don't be such a guppy," I coo. He gives me a look of exasperation as Eli swims up beside him. He has been more than willing to help me. I think he's enjoying Ian wet and shirtless as much as I am.

"Great, now she's saying it to the both of us," Eli grunts, and I laugh, throwing him a wink over my shoulder as I help Ian back onto the board, and he wobbles.

"This looks a lot easier from the shore," Ian grumbles, and I suppress a giggle.

"It's going to take time and practice, but if you'd like I can tandem surf with you, or I'm sure Eli wouldn't mind?" He nods immediately, and I snort.

"Are you sure you're up for this?" I ask Ian again as I know his eyes are glued to my ass and chest. I had already shed my wetsuit, and I am flaunting the joys of breastfeeding in my bikini.

His cheeks flush, and he rubs the back of his neck, finally meeting my gaze. His eyes are shimmering with lust, and I bite my lip.

"Okay, you crazy kids, let's do this," Eli says, walking over to me and throwing me over his shoulder. He runs us deeper into the sea, and I yelp as I'm tossed in. I come up sputtering, and he winks.

"You needed to cool off, babe. There are still children present." I gape at him, and he bends over, laughing his ass off. Oh, I am so going to get him back for that.

Ian holds out his hand for me to take and helps me to my feet. He's also fighting a laugh, and I roll my eyes. Ugh, I chose two immature man children to date.

"Okay, are you ready? When you see that lip in the waves, I want you to pop up and stay on your feet, keep your knees bent, and let me do all the movements? Okay… Now!" I yell as we both pop up. Ian wobbles a bit, and I plant my feet harder to the board as he grips my hips to steady himself. We hit some easy waves and nail a cutback when he gets cocky and tries to let me go.

“No, Ian. Don’t,” I shout right before we wipe out. I crash into the water and let the waves ragdoll me.

Fuck! I hope Ian knows not to fight the waves. Strong arms grip me around the waist, and I open my eyes to Ian breathing underwater as if we were on land. He holds me to his chest as he pushes up to the surface with ease.

I take in a few deep breaths of sea salt air and cough. Ian rubs my back as he still supports us. I gaze into his ocean blue eyes as he stares back at me. I blink a few times as Eli starts calling out for us.

Wow, we are really far out. Ian lets me go, and I move my feet to keep from sinking. The water is so peaceful right now, and I could just stay here. I turn and float on my back for a minute.

Ian follows and offers me his hand to hold. I give him a big smile. This is amazing. I know we have one hell of a swim back, but for now, this is perfect.

We swim back, and Ian beats me by a mile. “Wow, you are an amazing swimmer. Better watch out babe, he may take your number one ranking.” I shout over to Eli. He’s sitting on his board a little ways away. Watching us, but he doesn’t look threatened.

“I’ve been needing a good competitor. Ever since my last heat against…” he trails off, and I finish for him.

“It’s okay Eli, you can say his name. I know it’s still fresh, but I will never stop talking about Brady. Especially to Bash. He will always know who his daddy was.” A splash sounds then strong arms wrap around me from behind, and Ian moves in front of me. I’m the filling in a hot guy sandwich in the middle of the sea, and it’s making me think back to that super vivid sex dream.

Okay, I think it’s time to go in. I’m starving. I paddle back into the shoreline, and Ian kisses the sand. I laugh and raise my brow.

“I never thought I would be grateful for land. I am not meant to be on top of the water.” He tells me so seriously I bite my lip from bursting out in giggles. I shrug and shake my hair out from the high ponytail it's been in all day.

“Surfing isn’t for everyone, Ian. I won’t hold it against you.” He gives me a grateful smile. My stomach rumbles again, and I groan. “Let’s go get some lunch and celebrate,” I suggest and Eli nods. Ian looks a bit pale and shakes his head.

“You guys go. I’m going to go back to my room and lie down for a bit. I think I ate something bad, and all the crashing into the water upset my stomach.” I move closer and check his forehead. Eli snorts, and Ian rolls his eyes. “It’s my stomach. I’m okay. Sext me later.”

“Are you sure man?” Eli asks, and he nods. Eli laughs and gives him a wink. “Well if that’s what you really want, I’m game.”

I bite my lip from laughing, and Ian furrows his brow but nods again. He gives me one more smile before walking back up the beach to our hotel. Eli wraps his arms around me and lifts me off my feet in a spin. I squeal, and he laughs.

“Why do I have the feeling he doesn’t know what he’s asking for?” I shake my head and laugh, thinking of some of the things he says.

We get back to the room after having ice cream with some of the other competitors, and Eli suggests taking a short nap before dinner. I strip out of my shorts and bikini, then steal the tank top he just tossed off. I slip it on and climb onto the bed.

"Fuck, you look hot in my clothes," Eli groans, and I giggle. "Perfect time to send your boy a 'sext.'" I bite my lip as he pulls his phone out of his pocket and opens his camera. "Are you sure about this Skye?" I nod, and he takes a few pictures, telling me what to do. He sends them off, and we wait.

I lean back against the pillows and raise my brow. He's standing there in just his swim shorts and looking delicious. I sit up then kneel on the bed in front of him. He gives me a smirk, and I reach out, running the tips of my fingers down his abs.

"What are you doing, baby?" I give him a shrug and gently pull the band of his shorts away from his stomach. "Am I the only one sending pics?" I ask. He laughs and runs his fingers through my messy hair as I lean down and kiss his chest. A moan slips out as he grips the strands tighter and pulls my mouth up to his, kissing me hard.

I run my nails down to his hips and tug his shorts down, letting them pool to the floor around his ankles.

He steps out of them, then pulls away from my lips, pushing me onto my back. I place my hand on his stomach and gently push. He hovers above me with a look of question, and I give him a wink, then reach up and roll him onto his back next to me.

I don't give him time to flip the script. I start to kiss his neck, leaning over him sideways as my hair tickles his lower half. He moans, and I muffle his sounds with my mouth as I reach down and grip his hard cock. I give him a few pumps as he struggles to not take control. I release him and straddle his chest before wiggling down and bringing the tip of him into my mouth. His hips jolt, and I groan as he thrusts down my throat. I hum at the treat he's giving me. I can taste the salt from the sea and him. Delicious.

Shaking hands grip my shoulders and wrap under my arms, tugging me off. I release him with a pop and moan as he lifts me to straddle his face. The amount of speed he did this with has me falling off the edge of the bed as he devours me. Juices drip down my thighs as he grips my ass tight, not leaving room for him to breathe.

I bite my lip to try and contain my cries, but I know Ian is overhearing one hell of a show right now through the thin walls. A hot smack hits my left butt cheek, and I whimper. Eli slows his licks and lifts me so he can speak.

"Let him hear you, Skye. Let him grip his hard cock and pump it to the sounds of what I do to you. Let him imagine it's his mouth eating this delicious snack."

The blood is rushing to my head from being upside down, and my nails are digging into the hardwood floors. I'm so close, and his dirty talk is about to push me over the edge, but when he shoves two fingers in my pussy and rims my ass, I explode, screaming his name.

A thump on the other side of the adjoining door brings a smile to my lips, and I clench my thighs tighter around Eli's head. He laughs, and the vibrations have me whimpering. I use the floor as support to slide the rest of the way off the bed, but before my feet can hit the floor, he grabs my ankles and spins me around.

"Eli, what are you?" Oh my god! What has gotten into him? I wrap my legs around his waist and take his hands to help pull my arms around his neck. He thrusts into me with no warning, and my mouth falls in a silent scream.

"This tight pussy will be the death of me. So hot, the way it glides along my hard dick, claiming

me, not wanting me to leave." I shudder and squeeze him tighter, letting my nails dig into the skin of his neck. He grunts, and I smile. Two can play this game.

I rest all my weight on his chest, and as he falls back to the mattress, I kneel and take him for a ride. His mouth drops in surprise as the cloth hits him in the face. He reaches the collar of his tank I'm wearing and rips it down the middle. I stop rotating my hips and watch as his eyes heat with lust. He takes one of my pebbled nipples into his warm mouth, and I shudder, gushing around his dick.

I'm close again, and I need to know one thing while I have him at my mercy.

"Tell me what you would do right now if Ian was to break down that door and join us." He groans, and I can feel as his dick hardens more. I moan and claw his abs as he starts to jackhammer me from below.

"I would have him fuck this tight little ass as I take you just like this. Then when he was close, I would flip you over and let him spray these gorgeous tits before licking them clean."

He bites down on my nipple again, and I'm done. Finished. Kaput. I lean forward and bite his shoulder hard as I explode all over his cock. He jolts up into a sitting position and flips me onto my back before throwing my legs over his shoulders and pounding me into the mattress. I cling to the blanket as I thrash and turn. He brings me to the peak one more time, and I don't think I can come again.

"Come on baby, I'm not going to stop until I am covered in your cream," he growls before reaching down and pinching my clit.

"Eli!" I scream as he roars my name, coming with me. I'm dead. I've been dicked to death.

"Now, it's naptime," Eli grunts as he rolls to my side. I laugh, trying to catch my breath before curling up into his side as he wraps an arm around me, moving up and down my spine, twirling his fingers into my hair. I sigh and relax, letting my eyes flutter closed. Today has been amazing, and I can't wait for tonight.

I wake to my phone buzzing, and Eli wrapped around me like a koala. I wiggle out from under him and reach for my phone.

"Hey!" I answer cheerfully.

"*Hey, sis, we saw you on the news. You dominated those waves. Just like I knew you would. Told you you're a total Betty."* I laugh at that, and a male's voice in the background has me pausing.

"Thanks, how are you feeling? Who is there with you?" Nina giggles, and I smile. She seems better than yesterday. "Were you even really sick?" I tease, but I'm starting to get the big picture. She scoffs then groans.

"It was better this way, Skye. You deserved to have a weekend of fun. With whoever you wanted to be with." I cut her off.

"I wanted you to be here, too. You and me always." Nina sighs, and I know she's about to say something harsh.

"Always, Skye. But it's not just us anymore. We're growing up, getting older. It's good to separate from time to time. Hey, I have to go. I'm kinda on a date." My eyebrows raise at that, and before I can question her, she gives me a quick. *"Kay, love ya, bye."*

I end the call confused and check my messages. I still haven't heard from Arielle, and I'm starting to get annoyed. I have an unread message from Ian, and when I click it, my gasp wakes Eli. He glances over my shoulder at my phone and groans.

I never thought he would respond, let alone with a pic of his hard cock, wrapped tight in his hand. Cum sprayed over his chest. "Yeah, that's hot," Eli whispers before flipping me onto my back and

kissing me.

His fingers find my dripping core, and he wastes no time bringing me to a toe curling orgasm. I grip him, and he shudders, pumping his hips into my hand. A long groan leaves his lips before I'm splashed with his cum all over my belly.

"Shower time," he tells me before lifting me up and tossing me over his shoulder. I grunt, and he laughs, smacking my ass.

"Hey, I guess he really has been asking me to sext him this whole time," I say with a giggle, and Eli places me to my feet, kissing me hard before turning the water on. I follow him in and quickly wash off the day. Salt and sand is not the greatest thing for your skin if left on too long.

We towel off, and I move over to my suitcase to get dressed. "What do you want to do for dinner?" I ask Eli as he air dries and walks over to the bed. He plops down and grabs the remote.

"*We* are not going out for dinner. I am going to stay in and get some room service. You are going to go out with that sexy guy next door and have a great time." I raise my brow, and he laughs. "Have fun, Skye. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

Skye

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

"Hey, want to grab some dinner?" I ask him as soon as he opens the door.

He's in low slung basketball shorts and no shirt. His abs are on full display, and I can't help but think about the picture of him covered in his own cream. Damn, even though I just had an amazing orgasm, I'm ready to go again. I trail my eyes down to his feet and then back up to his chest. He's saying something, but I'm lost in a trance. He steps closer, pulling me back to the present.

"I'm sorry, what?" He laughs and tugs my hand, pulling me into his room. He leans down and kisses my neck, groaning as he inhales my body wash.

"I said, yes, but let me finish this episode." I nod, dazed and confused. There is some fishing show on the T.V., and he seems enthralled.

"It's fascinating, they use these poles and hooks to catch their dinner. Which is completely cheating, but it works. I would love to try it someday." I take a seat on the bed, and he plops down next to me.

"You have never been fishing?" Now that seems far fetched. He shakes his head and is contemplative for a minute.

"I have fished. Just not like this." He leaves it at that, and I watch for a minute with him, then my stomach grumbles loudly.

"Oh, right. Would you like to get some food?" I turn and look at him. He has an odd expression on his face, but he nods.

"Yes… Uh yeah, sounds good. I'll just watch this later then. Just let me get dressed."

"Do you have to?" I blurt out, and my cheeks redden. He gives me a cocky smirk, and I turn away.

I still can't get his picture out of my mind. Warm breath hits my neck, and I shiver. He breathes in and groans.

"You always smell so edible." I turn to face him, and his lips are so close to mine. All I would have to do is press forward a few inches. He sits back suddenly and climbs off of the bed, walking towards his bathroom.

"What do you want to eat?" he hollers from the open door.

I lie back on the bed and quietly groan, running my fingers through my hair in annoyance. Why does he affect me this way? He acts like some big cocky guy, but then he also gives off this innocent vibe, and it is driving me crazy.

"Maybe sushi," I suggest, and I swear a whimper comes from the bathroom. He clears his throat and agrees.

He is so weird, but I'm digging it. But the question still remains.

Who are you, Ian Casp?

Caspian

I'M NOT AS nervous as I thought I'd be going on a date with Skye.

More concentrated.

Watching her with Eli. *Kissing, touching…hearing them fuck.* She's been making subtle moves towards me, and after her getting close to me on the bed, hell, after the picture she sent me–I'm positive it's the right call.

I must have ordered a surprising amount of sushi for a Human, one of every raw fish roll they had, because Skye's eyes bulge, and she starts to mutter about money which makes me laugh.

I pull out a black card. "No limit."

"Wow…*okay.*" She gives a light giggle before putting a strand of hair behind her ear that slipped free. "So, you must really love fish?"

I bark out a laugh. "Something like that."

"And you realize they are going to have to push like," She looks around at the space around us, "at least 3 other tables into ours to hold that amount of food."

That observation does make me feel like a dick, and I rub the back of my neck as I let out a nervous laugh. "Ugh, yeah. Probably should have thought of that." This wasn't the castle dining hall that had a table big enough for fifty Sirens. This was a small, intimate restaurant with tables barely big enough for our drinks.

I really wish I could tell her half of my thinking or Human faux pa slip-ups I keep having around her, but I can't. But fuck if it wouldn't make things easier and help me not to look like such an idiot. I decide not to dwell on it and change the subject, but before I can she speaks up.

"*So*…How long have you been at the mansion on the cliff for? Do you have family here at the cove also or-" She leaves it open ended and has a slight blush on her cheeks that makes it hard not to reach over and touch them.

I take a drink, giving myself a pause to go over my rehearsed explanation of how I came to Kelly Cove. "I inherited the place from my family that passed away." Her mouth drops open, and immediately, she's apologizing for something that's not her fault, even if it's not true.

I hate that standard. I always have, and I don't know why. I guess I just feel that saying, sorry for your loss, doesn't help. But really, what else are people supposed to say, so whatever. Either way, I feel like a dick for piling on more lies to the start of our relationship. "It's fine, I didn't really know them."

"But how does that work exactly? Don't you have to be eighteen or something?"

"I am eighteen. Just moved in on my birthday." I wink at her, but before I can change the subject to something more intimate, the waitress shows up to refill our drinks.

"Just letting you know it will be another ten minutes on the appetizers, and we will be moving you to one of our bigger family booths towards the back to accommodate your meal."

Skye nods with a smile and tells her that's fine, and I grab her hand, giving it a squeeze as we follow the small framed, blonde back to our new table. I lean over putting my mouth into Skye's hair, smiling when she shivers.

"Thank god for the big order, now I'll have you all alone with no witnesses." I hear her suck in a breath, and I chuckle as I pull back right in time for the waitress to turn and present us with a half circle booth.

The space and table is huge, and the bonus is that it's even darker and more intimate back here. No one is around, and it's probably reserved space for private parties, but the thing that really works out better than I could have planned myself is now I'm going to be right next to her instead of across a table.

She must be feeling the same energy because as soon as the waitress leaves, she turns to me with an intense stare before clearing her throat and stepping back. "Do you want to-" She's nervous, and I can't help the predatory smile that fills my face. It makes her stumble back again, and that's not her. She isn't clumsy, so I know she's affected by my presence.

"Go ahead, Skye. No matter where you sit, you won't be able to get away from me." I take a step closer to her, and I see her breathing pick up as the smell of her rapid lust hits the air.

My powers flare, but I keep my eyes from lighting up and freaking her out, I do let them out to play though. What good is the power of sexual pull if you can't use it.

"Every inch of your space." Another step, and the back of her knees hit the edge of the booth, and her ass hits the cushion. Her face is flushed now.

"Every inch of your air." I step into her and place my hand over hers, holding onto the table while I lean into her. I can taste her breath on my lips, and my dick strains in my pants from the pressure. "Every fucking inch of you, my siren, is mine."

I swallow her gasp as I give in and crash my lips against hers, and soon it's a moan that matches mine.

Fuck, she tastes delicious. And I'm a goner.

The lust is making me woozy, along with her breathy moans and satin lips. I push her back and thank whoever the fuck for the space because she's pulling me on her and driving her tongue in my mouth.

I pull back and run a hand through her hair and stare into her eyes. "I'm never going to stop now."

Her gaze breaks from mine and lands on my lips. "I don't want you to."

Fuck it.

I lose control, and so does she.

She's moaning into my mouth, and I wordlessly reply by pulling her legs further apart and grinding into her. I feel a weird tingle running down my spine before the electric feeling I used to have while watching her hits me, and I pull back and gasp when I see her eyes screwed up and a hand on her

chest.

I fly back off her. “Skye, what’s wrong?”

She opens her eyes and looks dazed but then normal as I help her to sit up. “Umm, it’s gone now. Just a weird pain.”

I feel like all the blood is rushing to my head. There can’t be that much of a coincidence. I was drawn to her. Pain when I get close to her but can’t have her. She was having some type of pain that eased with my touch the other day, and now we have some weird pains at the same time.

“Ian, what’s wrong, why are you looking like you saw a ghost?” I shake my head to clear whatever she may be seeing on my face. There’s no way she can tell by my expression that I was thinking she’s my mate. The sea witch took that though.

I turn around, trying to get the thoughts from my head, but I’m saved from answering her as the wait staff comes in with our order. Whether she is my mate or not, I have to go back to my world and be King. And no matter how much that might fuck with me, Humans couldn’t be turned into a Siren or Nix. We’d always be separated by land and sea. I came up here knowing exactly what this was.

Limited time with the girl I’m drawn to, but it is just that, limited time.

It was better than nothing, and now I needed to make the most of it and suck it up.

I scoot in as close as I can to Skye in the middle of the half circle booth and grab her chin, pulling her lips to mine in a slow, sensual kiss that goes straight to my cock. If I hadn’t ordered so much food, I’d tell them to bag it all up and take this back to my room. I abandon that thought as my stomach grumbles, and I reach forward, foregoing the two sticks Skye grabs, and use my fingers to pick up part of the raw tuna roll.

I have to force myself not to inhale every inch of this and act with manners so she doesn’t think she just made out with a pig.

Her moan, which sounds a lot like the one she was making earlier, grabs my attention, and I look over to her, licking her lips. “I know it’s a little cliche, I love fish, but the California roll has always been my fave.”

I look at the sushi she grabs up with the sticks and try to analyze it. “What does it have in it?”

She shoves it forward. “Try it.”

I shrug and let her feed me, which seems to excite her, so I can’t help the chuckle that slips out as I chew while trying to figure out what’s in it. “It tastes like chewy, fake fish.”

I’m guessing it’s not by the extreme reaction that has water spilling out and down her chin as she laughs and puts a napkin up. Before long, I’m laughing too. “What?”

“It’s supposed to be cooked crab, which is surprising because of the price, but this is absolutely imitation crab.” She takes another bite, seeming unfazed by imitation.

“So, it’s fake crab?” I ask, taking another bite of my real fish. Thank Poseidon for that.

She raises an eyebrow at me and scoffs out a laugh. “Okay, I have to ask.”

“Okay?”

“Where did you live before, because it kind of seems you lived under a rock?” She pauses and a bright red covers her face. “No offense.”

I bark out a laugh, not insulted at all. I completely understand, and I’m not mad at her insinuation, but it sucks that I can’t explain why I don’t know these things. I sigh and go back to eating.

“No offense taken, just hard to explain.”

She tilts her head but accepts my answer. “I’m just saying, if you finish all of that sushi-” She points to the fifteen plates covering our table. “I’m going to put you in some contest so we can win some money.” She laughs and goes back to eating.

I'm glad we've laid off the questions of my weirdness, for now. Unless me eating this much is weird by Human standards. I shrug at my internal debate and decide to change the subject. "Will Eli approve of us?"

Not that I gave a shit what he thought, but I'm curious as to how this will work. Is this something that's normal for Humans? Having more than one mate? Or, partners at the same time?

She sighs before biting her lip. "I choose who I belong to."

Good answer, but- "When it comes to me?"

"I really don't think I ever had a choice. I've wanted you since the moment I saw you." Her answer makes my chest flare, and I want to shove all this food to the ground and throw her on this table to finish my meal another way but contain myself…barely.

"Why did it take you so long?" I ask and go back to eating.

"Why did it take *you* so long?" She counters, and I laugh.

"Good point, but I was serious earlier." I wipe my mouth and turn my body to fully face her. "Eli or not, I don't think I can stop now. I don't want to."

She surprises me and turns to me as well before putting a hand on my arm. "And I was too. I don't know what it is I feel for you," Her blush is back, and I lean in, unable to help it and kiss her again. "I feel drawn to you in a way that's almost painful." She finishes as I end the kiss.

"Then let's not stop. Whatever the fuck this is, I want you, and I don't think anyone could pull me away now if they tried." The thought of my family and legacy comes to mind, and my chest feels tight with the omission. "As long as you'll have me Skye, I'm yours."

THE REST of the night went perfectly. More stolen kisses, and I ate my whole kingdom's worth of sushi. That, along with more awkward answers, and Skye's beautiful laugh, I could see us together for longer than I can stay.

After we got back to our rooms, against my better judgment, I turned down a movie with her and Eli. I hated to see her adorable pouty lip, but if I would have gone back to the room with her, I would have ended up getting her naked. I don't give a shit if Eli is there, but for our first time, I need it to just be us.

Someone knocks on the door, pulling me from a very sexy dream. I had a little siren all tangled up in seaweed as I feasted on her.

"Finnley, get the door." I grunt and giggles respond, making me open my eyes. I glance around at the empty hotel room and groan, then kick off the sheet that is more like a torture chamber and sit on the edge of the bed. I blink a few times then get to my feet and stumble to the door. I open it to a cheery Skye and grumpy Eli.

Skye hands me a tray of coffee then gets on her tiptoes to press a quick kiss to my lips. I growl into her mouth and am about to chuck the sewer water to the floor when Eli coughs. Skye pulls away with flushed cheeks, and I toss a smirk Eli's way.

Fucker can deal. I have had to witness them making out everywhere this whole weekend and not to mention the sex they purposefully performed from the other side of the wall. Well maybe I'll thank him for that. I experienced my first live eruption. Those sex videos Kelby showed me don't compare.

"So I need to Facetime Nina. She went and got Bash from his grandma's this morning, and I just need to see him. I'm having serious withdrawals. I can't believe Arielle's phone broke. I think she was just keeping him away on purpose. I know I was supposed to relax and have fun this weekend and I did, in spades, but I still need my updates." She goes on a little bit of a rant, and I nod along like Eli is. I found if I mimic him, I don't get as many odd looks.

"Okay babe, then let's go call him, then we can hit the beach before we drive back to Kelly Cove." Eli suggests, and I glare at him. He raises his brow at me, but come on, he always swoops in like Spiderpig, saving the day, but dammit, it's my turn for once.

"Yes, you're right. I'm sorry, Ian, that we woke you, but it is after eleven. We want to be on the road by three this afternoon. So, get dressed lazybum, and come play with us."

She waggles her brow at me, and I can't help but think about 'playing with her'. I must have a weird expression on my face because Eli laughs, tugging Skye to come with him so I can get dressed. He looks back at me before I can shut the door.

"Checkout is in thirty minutes so pack all your stuff up, and we'll toss it in the truck." I nod, hand him back the tray of drinks, then shut the door. I sit back down on the bed and groan, rubbing my eyes.

I pull my call out and send Kelby a sext. He sends me a picture of him and Nina in reply and I growl. That is not what I had asked him. I press the picture of his face and he answers.

"Yes, sire." he says, passive aggressively, and it pisses me off. I'm already fighting to control my anger over that stupid fucking spider pig, and I know my temper is short today.

"Ask Finnely what a fucking 'Facetime' is!" I roar over the line, and I can hear his audible gulp. He apologies and I sigh. Some habits are hard to break. I see the way Skye and the other Humans treat their friends, and Kelby is a friend, not a servant.

"She says, it's like a call but with live pictures." I nod, even though he can't see me. I thank him then hang up.

I get dressed in something similar like I wore yesterday. Skye seemed to like seeing me in a sleeveless top so I might as well keep wearing whatever will keep her eyes on me. I quickly pack all my shit into my duffle bag so wonderboy can put it in his vehicle. I glance around for anything I might have missed, then shrug and leave the room.

Eli is there waiting as Skye is baby talking to her son. I stop and watch. I can't stop the smile from showing. This small break was good for her, and I'm happy I got to come. In more ways than one, but next time I'd like to have her with me.

I follow them out to the lot where they leave their cars and toss my bag in the trunk. I still can't get over it's called that. When I think of a trunk, I think of the elephants Kelby showed me once.

"So I was thinking maybe we could have some beach time, no water today. I think I'm watered down if I'm honest."

She leans on the side of a bench as Eli talks to her son. He's making funny faces, and I don't know if I should do the same. I've really only held him once, and I still have to figure out what that weird vibe meant.

I don't think her baby is Human. The energy I feel flowing off of him is definitely something supernatural. I need to do more investigating.

"Yeah, babe. Beach day sounds great." Eli hands Skye her call back and looks to me. I nod and give her a wink.

"As long as you're in a skimpy suit, I'm up for anything." She rolls her eyes and grabs my hand.

FUCK I really should have thought this shit through. A white ball comes flying at my head again and I duck. Skye laughs, and Eli groans.

"Please babe, let me switch sides with you," he begs, and she shakes her head. I'm not that bad am I? He gives me a pointed look and his look of defiance is making my dominance rise to power. I will make him bow to me on his knees.

I need to get myself under control. Skye slips under a plastic sheet with holes and stands in front of me.

"Hey, handsome, you said you knew how to play volleyball. Just keep your arms up." She lifts my arms, running her nails along the veins and I tremble. My dick gets hard, and I curse the little siren. "And smack the ball. Okay?" I nod, and Eli mumbles something under his breath.

"How about a bet?" Skye offers, and Eli nods excitedly.

"Hell, yes! What's on the table, babe?" She looks between us and shrugs.

"Winner gets to bury the other in the sand? I'll even make it fair. Eli, take my spot." Eli snorts, but agrees. I don't care much either way. I just want to get that little purple bikini off her body. My brain is officially in between my legs right now.

I finally get the hang of this game and keep smacking the ball over the net. Skye claps for me, and Eli looks pissed. Ha-ha fucker.

After an intense game, Skye and I officially win.

Eli pouts, and Skye gives him some kisses to make him feel better. Damn, should I have lost? I want some more strawberry flavored kisses. I can't eat the actual stuff which sucks, but she tastes so sweet, I can almost imagine it being the real thing.

Skye walks over to a part of the beach that people aren't crowding and starts to dig a hole using her hands. I follow suit and Eli joins too.

"If I don't help, then we will be here all day," he grunts and earns another kiss. I pout a little, making Skye laugh, and she walks over and kisses me too. I try to deepen it, and she pulls away, giggling.

We get the hole situated and start to bury Eli in the sand. Skye shapes him some impressive tits and then starts to give him a mermaid tail. I help and even search for seaweed with her for Eli's impressive mermaid hair, and find I'm actually having fun. This is completely childish, but I find myself laughing with them, and dare I say, bonding?

Skye wipes her forehead of the sweat with her arm, then faces me. She has a clump of seaweed stuck to her cheek, and I lean over to wipe it away. I get lost in her green eyes, and they pull me in like a siren's call.

"Beautiful." I mumble before gripping the back of her neck and pressing my lips to hers hard. She whimpers and kisses me back just as passionately. I let a hint of my siren lust free, and Eli grunts.

"That's so hot," he groans, and it sounds painful. I pull back, and Skye blinks while licking her lips. I glance at him and he's wincing.

"Dude, don't ever get an erection while buried in the sand." I burst out in a laugh and help Skye dig him free. I glance behind me at the sea–my home– my family– then at the people before me. Who welcomed me into their family. I know my time is running out, and I'm going to miss days like today.

Once we brush off and rinse our feet using these outside showers, we climb into the truck and head back to Kelly Cove. Eli and Skye bicker over the music, and I lean against the window watching the coastline. Something catches my eye, and I know that there is a storm brewing beneath the waves. Kassia started a war, and soon, I'm going to have to finish it.

Elliot

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I wake up early, hoping to sneak out before Cal catches me. I know Skye said it's fine, but this is still new for us, and I don't want to start off on the wrong foot with her family. I press a kiss to her temple, and she moans, waking up.

"What time is it?" She gives me a sleepy yawn and opens her beautiful green eyes. I get lost for a minute and fight not to go back to bed with her.

"It's still early. Go back to sleep." I kiss her gently on the lips, and she smiles.

"Okay," she mumbles before rolling over and going back to sleep. I watch her for a few minutes then slip out the door. I peek in on Bash. He has his little butt in the air and his thumb in his mouth. I can't believe how much he's grown.

I bend down and give him a kiss on his head, careful not to wake him before sneaking out. The house is silent, and I think I'm in the clear until Cal walks up to me with a bagel and a travel mug of coffee.

"Really, Eli? The walk of shame does not suit you," he says with a shake of his head. "I guess I should be grateful you didn't slip out the window like the orange-haired kid Nina is seeing." I freeze and wait to be berated, but he just shoves the food and mug in my hands and walks away whistling.

I shake my head and take a sip. That was better than I thought it would be, and who is Nina seeing? I wonder if Skye knows?

I step out in the dawn breeze and stride over to my truck. I have an hour before I have to meet the team for practice. The waves call me to get in a quick surf, but I'm still a little sore from this weekend, and I know after working out today, I will be dead on my feet.

I HOP out of the pool and grab my towel. “Good practice today,” Coach calls as we head to the locker room to change before hitting the weights. This weekend was amazing, and I’m still on a high. Sam corners me in front of my locker and smacks my shoulder.

“Bro, what are you on, and where can I get some?” I snort and shake my head. “No, seriously, you haven’t been able to wipe that smile off your face, and you got distracted earlier in the pool.”

I ignore him, change into some shorts, and move over to the weight room. I set up a bench with weights and start a few reps as Sam spots me. He tries to keep talking, but I grunt, and he finally shuts up. He knows I need silence to concentrate. I finish my set and we switch. A few of the other guys trickle in and hit up some of the other machines. When he’s done, I grab the bottle and start spraying down the bench and bar.

Sam grabs some paper towels and hands them over. He’s practically vibrating with restraint. I give him a glare, and he gives up.

“So… How was this weekend? I saw your girl on T.V. Bro, she killed those waves.” I laugh as I grab a bottle of water from the cooler. I toss one to him, and he throws me a towel to get the sweat out of my eyes.

“It was kickass. Skye got out of her head and just had fun. She’s needed it, man. She was in a dark place for a while there. I don’t think the fog has completely lifted yet, but we’re working on it.”

He gives me a frown and looks over at the other guys. “Is this serious? Because, I think I need to tell you something.” He looks back at me and his serious expression has me nervous.

“What’s going on?” He opens his mouth to tell me when Ian walks in with some of the other guys. I give him a nod, but as he comes over, Sam mumbles something under his breath before walking away.

“Hey, man, what’s up?” I ask Ian as he glances around the room. It’s nothing too special, but we have the necessary equipment.

“I have a room full of these machines at my house. I’ve just never used them.” I laugh at that, and he gives me a look.

“Dude, I get it, you're rich.” He shakes his head at that and runs his fingers through his dark hair.

“Money isn’t important to me. What’s rich? What’s poor? It doesn’t matter as far as I’m concerned.” I freeze at that and really look at him. Huh. I guess first impressions really are the worst.

“Noted. So, what are you doing here?” I ask him again, and he gives me a nervous smile, rubbing the back of his neck.

“I was hoping maybe you could help me?” I nod.

“Right, you wanted to join the team. Hell yeah man, after what I saw Saturday, I think Coach will gladly let you join.” He shakes his head, and his cheeks are turning pink.

“Yes, I’d like to join, but no. I wanted to ask for your help with Skye. We still hardly know each other, and I wanted to do something nice for her.” I give him a grin, and he turns as if to leave.

“Forget it. I’ll figure it out.”

I reach out and grab his arm. “No, I’m just teasing you. Of course I’ll help. Meet after school? And I’ll talk to Coach too.” He gives me a nod, mumbles his thanks, then takes off.

I watch as he leaves and laugh. Wow, how things have changed so drastically in just a few days. I

mean, I don't miss the fighting, but then again, it was hot. I wonder what he's planning for Skye and if I can be included. I'm not one hundred percent sure what he needs my help with, but when it comes to Skye, I'd do anything to make her happy.

Sam comes back over and looks pissed. "Okay, I am just going to say this." I nod and move over to one of the treadmills. He follows and I wait. "Fuck, this is hard, because I haven't seen you this happy since before Brady died." I turn and cross my arms, giving him my full attention.

He takes a deep breath in, and he looks like he may be sick. "Coral saw Skye kissing Ian on the beach in Tyrulia Cove," he rushes out in one breath, and I stand there shocked for a minute before laughing. I smack him on the shoulder then turn the machine on and start a slow jog.

"Man, you had me scared for a moment there." I tell him through my chuckles. He gapes at me.

"Wait, you knew…and you're okay with it?" He shakes his head, confused and I nod.

"Um, so yeah, Skye and I are in a kinda throuple at the moment. If you thought she was cheating on me, it's all good." I say as my cheeks pink.

I never did think of how to tell people about our relationships. Skye has been judged enough lately, and I won't let people talk shit about her anymore. Especially over this. He turns his treadmill on and starts a slow walk.

I'm waiting for him to say something. I don't want to have to kick his ass. Sam is the closest friend I have these days. He starts talking, and I sigh in relief.

"So you what? Share her?" I nod, and he grins. "So like threesomes every night?"

"I wish," I mumble and shake my head. He turns towards me, eyes wide, then gives me a look of admiration, and I reach over, shoving his shoulder. He stumbles, but gets back on track, turning his speed up to match mine.

"Lucky," he grunts, and I can't help but nod. I am a lucky guy.

I REACH Ms. Scuttles class just in time before she can give me another write up. She seriously hates Coach and has no leniency when it comes to us being late due to showering after practice. Skye gives me a smile, and I blow her a kiss, loving her cheeks turn pink. She glances around, but no one is paying attention. I think what I said Thursday in the cafeteria really stuck.

Ian plops down on the chair next to hers, and she gives him a smile too. He gives her a cocky grin in return, and she rolls her eyes. We know now the real Ian, and the front he puts on is just that, a front.

"Okay class, today we are going to be starting a project." I groan, and Skye shoots me a wink. "I will be putting you in groups of three, and for the next two weeks you will be spending a lot of time with these people. I want you to get to know their deepest secrets. Their inner hopes and dreams. Then I want you to all make some kind of video together. Showing what you have learned. I will be quizzing you as well, so be sure to write down all your answers." I nod, okay that's not so bad.

I glance at Skye, but she's looking at Ian. He has his hands clenched, and his face has gone pale. I open my mouth to ask if he's okay, and the pipes above us all burst.

The girls scream, and I roll my eyes. "It's just like a shower. Chill out." I bark when Pearl runs into Skye, trying to leave the room. I take Skye's hand and give her a smirk.

"Looks like we get a free period." I waggle my brows, and she giggles, walking over to grab Ian. He's sitting at his desk, looking at his hands. The water pouring on his head not bothering him.

She crouches beside him and touches his cheek, pushing his dark, wet hair out of his eyes. "Ian, are you okay?" she asks him with a frown. He turns his head to look at her and instantly relaxes, then gives her a quick nod. She kisses his cheek, and he smiles before getting up from his seat and taking her hand.

We move out into the hall and ignore all the weird glances people are tossing our way. We walk to our lockers, and I pull out a hoodie for Skye to wear. She's shivering, and I wish she had a change of clothes.

Ian walks over to his and grabs a pair of gray sweats; he starts dropping trou in the middle of the hall, and Pearl gasps. I rush over to him and shake his shoulder.

"Ian, you can't strip right here. Are you sure you're okay?" He shakes his head and wobbles a little.

"Honestly, I think I need to sit down." I help him to the locker room and set him on a bench. He sighs, then rubs his eyes. I give him space and let him change as I take advantage of having a pair of sweats in my swim locker, too.

After a few minutes, he seems better and stands. "Thanks, I think I just got lightheaded." I nod and follow him back out into the hall where a worried Skye is.

She gives him a deep once over then grabs his arm and loops it with hers. I do the same, and we walk into the cafeteria. She's still worried about him, and you can tell her nurturing instinct is coming out.

"I'm fine Skye, just got a little seasick in class." Ian grumbles, and I laugh. She ushers us over to a table and has him sit down before she rushes to the food line and stocks up on protein, water, and a cookie.

"Just let her baby you, man. It makes her feel useful. She used to do the same thing for Brady when he was sick. She's been taking care of her father and sister for a long time." He gives me a nod and lets Skye feed him a bite of mashed potatoes when she returns. He swallows it down with a wince. She frowns at him and looks at me.

"Maybe he should see the nurse?" I shake my head, and she purses her perfect lips into an adorable pout. I can't help it. I lean over and kiss her. Trays hit the table, and I look over to Sam, Coral, and half the team moving around to sit with us.

Skye sits back and crosses her arms over her chest as if she should hide. Oh, hell no. Not anymore.

"If you guys are going to sit here, I think there is something you need to do." I snap, looking pointedly to my girl. Sam immediately catches my drift and apologies once again to Skye for being a total douche-canoe. His words. The other guys follow suit and even tell her they give her props for totally rocking the mom thing.

Skye awkwardly giggles, then goes back to fussing over Ian. I sigh and sit beside her. "He's okay now, babe." She gives me a kiss on the cheek and nods, dropping the spoon she was trying to feed him with.

A scoff sounds behind us, and I already know what's about to go down. I wrap a protective arm around Skye as Pearl and Bonnie come around the table. Pearl is tapping her foot, has her lips pursed and hands on her hips.

"What, was two dicks not enough for you, slut? You needed to steal our guys too." She snaps at Skye, and all the guys' mouths drop simultaneously. Mine included. I release Skye, and she grips my

arm, giving me a worried look. I flash her a smile and a wink and stand up.

"Hey, Pearl? Who was that guy's face you were riding Friday night when you told Aron that you were sick and couldn't go out?" Her face goes pale, and she starts to stutter. I glance over at Aron, and he has a sad look on his face.

"Sorry man, but I got a text from one of my friends over at the local college, it seems she's pledging the sorority there and wanted to catch some guys on tape so she could blackmail them to help her get in." I pause as the whole cafeteria listens to me spill Pearl's tea.

Aron gets up and walks over to us. "Baby, is this true?" She avoids his gaze then rolls her eyes.

"What the fuck does it even matter, it's not like you're more than just a fling. You caught me when I was down and feeling lonely that Ian blew me off." Sam stands and takes Aron by the arm, leading him from the room.

Skye slams her hands on the table then stands up. "That's it! I am so over your shit. You are one of the most cruel, manipulative, bitches I have ever met. How dare you. It's one thing to come after me, but to hurt someone as sweet and respectful as Aron. Girl, you have a lot of nerve, and you're lucky I have a little boy waiting for me at home or I would knock your ass out." She gets up in Pearl's face, and Pearl scoffs like she's a cute little bumble bee buzzing around her.

"You know what, Skye, I've got this." Coral says before slamming her fist into Pearl's fake nose.

I quickly snatch Skye out of the way as Coral goes full mama bear mode on Pearl's ass. Bonnie tries to break them up and gets an elbow to the boob, and she whines about ruining her implants. I roll my eyes and look over to Ian.

"Let's bounce."

"Hey, thanks for doing this." Ian says as soon as I open the door to my place. I suggested going to his house, but I guess his maid is 'washing the walls', whatever that means. It must be a rich person thing. I walk into the kitchen, and he follows like a puppy. I grab us some drinks, then turn around, and he's an inch away from me. Holy shit! I step back so we have some space between us.

"Yeah, no problem. You said you needed help with our girl. Plus, after that mess at lunch, I figured skipping out early was fine." I shrug, and his shoulders drop as if he was tense. I squeeze by him and walk over to the living room. I flip on the T.V. and plop down on the couch. I hand him a drink, and he shakes his head.

"Mind if I grab some salt water?" I wave towards the kitchen and pull out my phone, checking my messages. Skye has to work tonight so I doubt I'll hear much from her. Wait, did he say salt? He comes back into the room, guzzling the water down. I watch him with a wince.

"Did you seriously add salt to your water?" He nods and hands it over to me to try.

"It's not bad actually, and it has health benefits to it." I take a swig and almost throw up.

"Sharks, man! Did you add the whole bottle of salt?" He shrugs and looks out the window to the sea. I cough a few times then chug my lemonade. That was disgusting. "Yeah, you can keep your salty water, if I want another taste, I'll just go swimming." I grunt, and he sits down on the couch next to me.

He leans over me to place his glass on the coffee table, and I bite back a groan. Is he really here

to talk about Skye or is he wanting something more? He takes his time sitting back up, and I don't miss the way his eyes trailed my bare arms.

I get lost in his gaze for a moment, and a shiver runs through my spine, down to my semi-hard cock.

I lean closer to him, and his eyes widen. "Okay, well you've got me here. All to yourself. Is there anything you want to ask me?" I place my hand on his thigh, and he jolts, pushing it away. I pull away and sit back up. He gives me a look of panic, and I groan, running my hand in my hair.

"I'm confused. You like me right? Because you give off conflicting vibes."

He holds his hands up and shakes his head. "I'm sorry Eli, but I'm not into men. Not that there's anything wrong with you being that way. Love is love. It's actually common in my culture. And I will admit you are very attractive." He pauses, and I snort.

"Umm, thanks," I grumble then run my hand down my face. He is so confusing. The way he looks at me like he's studying me, checking me out all the time.

"Skye is the only one for me, but I can't lie about not envisioning us sharing her. Especially after that performance I heard at the hotel. I haven't been able to get it off my mind. The way you made her scream your name."

He shifts on the couch, hiding the growing bulge in his shorts, and I give him a smirk.

"No worries Ian, I get it, and yeah, I am definitely down for a menage trio." He crinkles his nose.

"A what?" I wave him off and take a sip of my drink. Well, at least I finally got some answers about that. Skye will be bummed. Hell, I'm bummed.

"Don't worry about it, now what do you want to know?" He gives me a look of shock.

"You still want to help me? Even though I turned you down?" I burst out laughing, and he shifts to leave.

"I don't know where you came from, but yeah, man. I took my shot, and you said no. I won't lie, I'm a little bummed, but I've got Skye, and I'm happy with just that." I shrug, and he nods, relaxing again.

He opens up a notepad on his phone and starts firing off questions. I put my hand up, and he stops.

"Didn't we just do all this?" I ask, because favorite food, color…it's starting to seem like deja vu. He shakes his head.

"No, she asked me, but I never thought to ask her back, and now I'm fucked as to what to get her. Finnely says when you start dating someone, you need to get them a gift. Thing is, I'm seriously clueless when it comes to her. You're her best guy friend so I thought you would be the person to ask."

"Who's Finnely?" I reach for a handful of chips as he tells me all about his maid-slash-friend. She's staying with him and Kelby in that big house on the cliff. "Where are your parents?" I wince as I realize that was insensitive. Maybe he doesn't have any.

"They died a long time ago. I got my inheritance when I turned eighteen so I moved into the family estate. Only stipulations were to stay topside and finish high school."

He starts going on about random things, and I'm having trouble keeping up as he bounces from topic to topic. Honestly, I'm starting to get a headache. He mentions jewelry, and I go to tell him Skye isn't into jewelry when he mentions rings.

"Wait, slow down. Ring size? Why the fuck do you need to know that?" I growl, and he pauses with his water to his lips. This is now his second glass, and every time he takes a sip, I feel sick.

"Well, I'd like to buy something that will link us together forever. Isn't that what you guys do? You trade rings?"

"Exfuckingcuseme!" I shout, and he jumps up, preparing for a fight. He looks confused and a little hurt at the prospect that I'm against him marrying the love of my life. "If anyone is marrying Skye Banks, it will be me."

I WALK DOWN to the pier to clear my head. I still can't get over what Ian said. I know he changed his tune real quick, but still, am I always going to worry that he's going to take Skye from me? I don't know what I would do if he took her and Bash away.

Now that I finally got her back, I am not going to let her go, ever. She is my forever. My future. She always was. Still, I can't help but think that if Ian changed his mind and wanted to explore that side of himself, I wouldn't turn him away. Until being with Skye, kissing Brady were the best moments of my life.

I get lost in my memories of the first time Brady and I kissed and don't notice someone has snuck up on me until they touch my arm. I jump and quickly wipe my eyes. When did I start to cry?

"Hey there, stranger," Eric says when I turn around. I give him a shaky smile, and he gives me a concerning look, then nods. "Want to talk about it? I have been known to be an amazing listener from time to time." I laugh, shaking my head, but follow him over to the bench people use when they want to watch dolphins. It's dark now, and the pier isn't very busy. *How long was I lost in my thoughts?*

He sits at the same time I do, and we laugh. I lean back and let the night breeze ruffle my hair.

"You loved him, didn't you? I think I always knew. Did he?" I rub my eyes and nod.

"Yeah, right before his accident we had started to confess how we felt. We had plans to come clean to Skye, but…" I trail off with a sniffle, and he pulls my head onto his shoulder, placing an arm behind me. He runs his fingers through my hair and it's nice. Calming. I turn to look at him, and he leans down and kisses me. I freeze and he freaks.

"Shit, I should not have done that. I'm sorry, Elliot. I know you're with Skye. Fuck, I'm an idiot." I sit there stunned for a moment and blink. He stands to leave and I follow.

"I have to go. I shouldn't have let my school boy crush take over my ability to control myself. I'm an adult for fucks sake." I shut him up with my lips and grip his throat tight, pulling him closer to me. I back him up against the railing of the pier and press my mouth harder to his, swallowing his groans, then pull away and squeeze my palm a little tighter, watching as his eyes flare with heat.

"Trust me, Skye will be thrilled." I tell him then release his throat and fix the collar of his shirt. I back away and give him a smirk. "Thanks for the talk, doc. I'll see you around." I leave him there panting against the railing as I walk home.

I've missed that. I love Skye, but there was something about my connection with Brady that was brutal, and I loved it. We could be rougher with each other than I'd ever be with Skye. Plus, he was my best friend; we connected on that 'guy' level too. I'd love that again, and the opportunity to take it even further. I wonder if Skye would be open to someone else joining our little family? I mean, he is a doctor, after all, and she is accident prone.

Skye

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

"There is my handsome man," I coo to a sleepy baby. He blinks then gives me the biggest smile.

He starts babbling, and I swear he's about to say Mama. I'm just waiting. My dad thinks his first word will be Dada, but I don't think he's right. Then again, Eli and Ian have been spending a lot of time with him since the competition. It's been really nice, even when Ian starts acting cagey and stressed out. He's been looking over his shoulder a lot lately too, as if someone is watching him, and he's avoiding the water again. He even threw a fit when I brought Bash into the sea to swim.

"Hey, beautiful," Eli comes up behind me and kisses my temple.

It's been a few weeks since our weekend away, and we have been alternating between beds, but most of the time we find ourselves here. It's easier for Bash to sleep, and I don't want to disrupt his life too much. I'm nervous about leaving after graduation. I mentioned it to Ian, and he was all for coming along. I hope that's still the plan, and he's not thinking of ending things with me.

Things are changing. Some for the best, and some, I'm not still sure about. I don't know if I'm ready. Like Eric kissing Eli. I mean, don't get me wrong, when he told me we fucked like bunnies, and I wouldn't mind being around to witness it live next time, but why now?

And would adding another guy to whatever this is be smart? I mean, I already have two guys, and that's another thing. I don't know if Eric is even into me or just Eli. They didn't get that far, and he left right after to go volunteer in the jungle somewhere for a few weeks. Eric has always had a huge heart and wanted to help those in need. He's wanting to do Doctors Without Borders when he graduates before taking over his dad's practice, and I want to leave. Get the hell out of Kelly Cove. How would this work?

Bash starts to cry from his room, and Eli hops up to grab him. I smile gratefully, and he gives me a real kiss before walking out the door. I listen through the monitor as he starts to sing him a song about fruit. I laugh remembering that familiar tune from my childhood. He babbles along to the melody as Eli changes a very messy diaper–if the commentary is anything to go by. Nina stops outside my door and bites her lip to keep from laughing.

I shake my head, and she enters my room, closing the door. "He is ridiculous. Adorable, but ridiculous." I nod, and she plops on my bed, then thinks better of it and sits in the chair.

"So, tell me, I have to know. Well, I mean I 'know' the walls aren't that thick, and Eli talks a lot during sex." My eyes bug at that, and she laughs. "Don't give me that look. I know you're having sex, Skye. Even Dad knows." Ugh, I think I may be sick. I sit down on the corner of my mattress and face her.

"I didn't think we were that loud. I mean, Bash always sleeps through it when we are at Eli's house." She laughs and pulls her hair out of her pony before putting it in a top knot.

"Sis, Bash will sleep through a hurricane and a marching band as they set off poppers. Your kid sleeps like a rock. I only hope I'm lucky to have such a good sleeper when I have kids."

"In ten years," my dad shouts from outside my door, and I cringe before getting up and opening it.

"Are you seriously eavesdropping?" I glance at Eli who is holding Bash and raise my eyebrows. "The both of you?" I scoff, and Eli at least looks chagrined. My dad has a huge grin on his face.

"Is it really spying when it's my house? I mean, I was just strolling along all innocently and heard my two daughters, which I love to the moon, talking. I just wanted to make sure there weren't any tears is all." He gives me the 'butter that won't melt in my mouth' smile, and I burst out laughing.

"Dad, you are far from innocent. Now, kiss your grandson goodbye because I have a date with him and a mermaid." He reaches for Bash, and I give Nina a wink.

"Talk later?" She nods, then stands and gives Eli a once over.

"I never thought you had a kinky side. Huh, it's always the nice guys." My jaw drops, and I snort.

Eli's gapes, and he avoids looking at my dad who looks like he might be sick. He takes Bash from his arms and goes to get him ready to leave. There is a play about mermaids at the local middle school, and I think Bash will enjoy it. Eli and Ian also mentioned going so we are having our first family outing. I'm nervous, but excited. I hope this is the first of many family days to come.

Eli brings Bash back into my room as I finish getting dressed, and I crack up in laughter. "Where in the world did you get that?" I ask as I try to catch my breath. He gives me a wink, and I take my little crab from him. "Did Eli dress you up as your namesake, Sebastian?" I ask him, and he pulls on the antenna on his head. I glance back to Eli, and he shrugs.

"It seemed fitting." I give him a quick kiss then sigh.

"It's adorable, but way too hot for him to wear all day. How about we take some photos, and you can put them on your social media, then we dress him in the shorts and tee-shirt combo I had picked?" He pouts but nods.

"I have arrived, and I'm ready to get my siren on." Ian shouts from the hallway, and I groan as he starts to sing *Under The Sea*, from the *Little Mermaid*. He's gotten accustomed to watching Bash's favorite movie now and sings the soundtrack frequently. I don't mind it since lately he's been all growly and on edge. Seeing him like this; carefree and fun, reminds me of our weekend away.

Ian walks into my room and pulls me into a kiss. I sigh against his lips, and he pushes me against my vanity, kissing me harder. I am three seconds from throwing him onto my bed when he backs away and drops to his knees. I glance at the open door with wide eyes. He gives me a devilish smirk and places a finger over his lips, telling me to be quiet. I nod, my pulse racing at the thought of being

caught or Eli watching us.

My panties are already soaked, and he shoves his face into them, breathing in my arousal. Why is that so hot? Gripping my hips, he slides them down, leaving them wrapped around my ankles. I bite my lip to hide my whimper as he licks up my thigh and to my center. It doesn't take him long to find that spot that makes me turn to goo, and my legs start to shake as he teases me. Bringing me to the edge only to pull away. I grip his dark hair tight and shove him deeper, and he groans before standing. His eyes flash with dominance and heat.

Oh shit!

I'm spun over the arm of the vanity chair, and my wrists are bound in his hand before I know it. He places them in the center of my back before dropping to his knees once more and finishing his snack. I bite the cloth to muffle my moans, and he smacks my ass hard. I glance at the door, not surprised to find Eli there. He's baby free and touching himself under his shorts. He holds a finger over his lips, and I nod as my eyes roll back.

"Please, Ian, don't stop. I need–" I beg, and he finally gives me what I want. Shoving two fingers into my pussy, while biting my clit hard, I explode. Juices drip down my thighs to my ankles, and he won't stop licking them up until my door closes.

Eli comes over to the chair and smacks his cock on my lips. I groan as Ian helps me to my knees before taking his own dick out.

"Open, baby," Eli growls, and I lick my lips, making them wait. Ian doesn't like that and grabs my hair tight, forcing my eyes to meet his. I whimper, and he smiles, releasing me.

"Are you going to be a good little siren and open up that pretty pink mouth and suck down every drop we give you?" Ian commands, and I clench my thighs. Oh sharks! I thought Eli's dirty talk was bad, I didn't know Ian had it in him too.

I nod and don't hesitate to take Ian deep as he starts to brutally fuck my mouth. He pulls away before coming, and I switch to Eli, taking him slower the way I know he likes it. I look up at him, and his nostrils are flared. I reach down and squeeze his ass, pulling him deeper, and he starts to shake.

"Finish him," Ian orders, and I snort. What does he think this is, a battle in *Mortal Kombat?* I slide my hand down my body and take some of my cream, then spread it on Eli's ass, gently pressing in.

He grips the back of my head, pushing me until he's all the way down my throat, then clenches his ass tight and starts to thrust hard. I moan and look up at him once more as he bites his lip hard enough to leave imprints, muffling his shout as he explodes down my throat.

I push back and take some needed breaths as he stumbles over to lie on the bed, spent. I glance at the clock. Shit, we need to leave like two minutes ago. Ian comes over and helps me to my feet. He hasn't come yet, and I give him a look. He takes one of my hands and grips his dick with it, pumping up and down fast and hard, looking me in the eyes the whole time. He bends to kiss my neck and grunts into my ear.

"Next time I have you on your knees, my cock won't be down your throat." I tremble at his promise to finally fuck me as his cum spills all over my hand.

"THERE ARE MY TWO FAVORITE GUYS," I say as soon as I get home from work. Eli stands and gives me a big kiss as Bash hangs onto the coffee table and gives me a three tooth smile. He's almost standing on his own, and I'm not ready. Last weekend Eli and I baby-proofed the house since he says Bash will be walking any day now.

"How was work?" He takes my purse and places it on the couch for me. I bend down and scoop Bash off before covering his little face in kisses. I sit on the couch and let Bash play with the strings from my hoodie.

"It was good. I am so grateful for Arielle, she has seriously whipped the restaurant into shape. Even Carla loves her, which is a feat in itself. How was he for you today?" I lean down and rub my nose into his hair, breathing in his baby shampoo.

"Dadmaaaa," I freeze and look over at Eli. My eyes wide, and his eyes filled with unshed tears.

"Did he just call you Dada?" I choke out, and he nods.

"Yeah, I think he did." He takes him from my arms and holds him close. "That's right, buddy. I'm your dada," he whispers, looking me in the eyes. I nod and let the tears fall. He may not be his by blood, but Eli has been by my side through it all. The late night cravings, rushing me to the hospital when my water broke, helping the nurses give Bash his first bath. He tried to be there for everything, and he was until I fell into my deep darkness and pushed him away. I was a fool.

"HEY, can you watch Bash tonight? I kinda want to go check on Ian. He's acting weird." Eli sighs, but nods.

"Skye, you need to let him come to you, babe. I've noticed he's been stressed lately, too. I asked him what's up, but he just said family shit. Whatever that means since he's an orphan."

"Would you think badly of me if I were to break into his fortress on the cliff? I mean, don't you think it's weird that he's always hanging here or at your place? We have never been inside his home?" He places Bash on my chest and walks over to the fridge to make us something to eat.

"What is getting into you, Skye? You seem paranoid. Things are really good right now. Do you need to swim against the current?" I scoff and roll my eyes.

"Something is going on, babe, and I am going to find out. I feel like I'm losing him and it hurts."

For all the talk and aggressive dominance Ian gave me on our date and the day we had our first group play, he's backed off a bit. I feel like I have to force him to kiss and touch me lately. I place Bash in his highchair, press a kiss to his forehead then move closer to Eli.

"I love you, and I love our family. Trust me?" He sighs and places the spoon on the counter.

"Always, Skye, you know I love you. Even your crazy."

I DRESS in all black and give Eli one more kiss. He shakes his head, laughing at my antics. "Say

goodbye to mommy, Bash. She's going to go break into Ian's house, and let her crazy fly." I roll my eyes and place a kiss on Bash's head.

I leave from the back door and walk along the beach, tracing my footsteps from that night. I reach the cliff where I almost made the worst decision of my life and thank whoever saved me that night. I wish I knew who, but maybe it was just my guardian angel.

A light from below the cliff has me leaning over, careful this time not to fall. What is that? I sit on my butt and grip the side of the rock, wincing at the pain before climbing down slowly. The waves crash below me, and my heart races at the prospect of falling.

What are you doing, Skye? You're not Nancy fricken Drew here! I snort at my inner thoughts and keep descending. I reach the mouth of a cave and stop. Lights line the path inside, and I know my curiosity is going to be the ruin of me. I take a deep breath and pray this isn't a shark's hideaway, then step in and move deeper into the cave. The water only reaches my knees so I'm thankful to have worn shorts, but my shoes are now soaked.

It spits me out at the shore line of Ian's house. *What the hell?* I glance around, but it seems someone just left as their huge gate is now closing with tail lights behind it. I look up at the huge house before me and gasp. It's incredible. All white marble and pillars. There is a fountain with a mermaid on the back patio, and it's breathtaking.

How does Ian own all this, and why have we never been invited? I slip off my wet shoes and leave them at the bottom of some stone steps that lead from the shore to a pair of french doors. I tip-toe even though it looks like I'm alone. I place my shaking hand on the doorknob and gently twist.

It opens, and I wait to see if an alarm goes off. After a minute with no noise, I step inside. I hesitate from shutting the door. *This is wrong. He's your boyfriend, Skye.* I bite my lip and glance around, but I don't move. I pull my phone out and dial Eli. He answers on the first ring, laughing.

"Please don't tell me you got busted, and this is your one phone call. I just got Bash to sleep. I swear now that he's crawling, he doesn't want to go to bed. He got into the kitchen cupboard tonight." I shake my head and laugh softly, though I know he can't see me.

"No, I'm standing in his kitchen and wondering if you were right."

"I'm always right, babe." I scoff and run my fingers through my messy brown hair. It's due for a cut, and I may even add some blonde.

"Listen Skye, I can't tell you what to do here. I know this has been bothering you for a long time now. Just don't be upset if it comes to bite you in the ass."

"Okay, you're right. I'm coming home." I end the call and turn to leave when my bladder makes its presence known. Crap. I softly shut the door and go in search of a bathroom. I find a hall closet full of drying seaweed. Um, that's weird.

I shut the door and keep looking for a toilet. This place is huge, and there are so many doors. Now that I've decided not to snoop, I am in fact, snooping. Ugh, I finally reach the bathroom, and I rush over to relieve myself. A sign on the wall catches my eye.

It's a plaque with a little merman silhouette and says, "Splash-tastic."

Oh, that is adorable. I wonder where they got it from. I'd ask Ian, but then I would have to explain how I knew about it. I'll just check online. I finish up, then move to wash my hands. They don't have any soap, so I open the shower curtain to grab some body wash or something. I step in, and my foot sinks into water.

I jolt back and look at the hatch that leads to the sea that sits in the middle of the damn shower stall. I take a picture because that's just weird, right? Even if there is a glass plate to cover it. Why would you want that? Does he swim in the nude or something? Or is it to dispose of things like

bodies?

No Skye, you're being crazy. I sigh and leave the bathroom, trying to find the kitchen again so I can leave. This was a mistake, all it did was raise even more questions. I must take a wrong turn because I find myself in Ian's bedroom.

The black silk sheets and textbooks on the floor prove it. I turn to leave when something catches my eye. A large trunk with the lid popped open. Something satiny and red pops out, and I can't help but take a small peek. A gasp of surprise leaves my lips.

"Holy shit," I mutter out loud and glance around. My spine tingles as if someone is watching me, but I don't see anyone. I reach in and pull out a leather whip and fuzzy handcuffs. My eyes are wide, and I am starting to piece some things together. Ian is into some super kinky shit. Like, he wants to hang me from the ceiling and whip me. There are boxes upon boxes of unopened toys and play items.

I feel light headed and turn to sit on the bed. Ian is standing in the doorway. Watching me. I avoid his eyes and look at my feet.

"Well, it seems I have caught myself a little thief," he growls. I look up at him and scoff.

"Ian, I am not here to steal your trunk of whatever it is," I say with an eye roll. I open the trunk of kinky things I found and drop the whip and handcuffs back in before glancing over at him. I am a mix of emotions right now. Am I not good enough for him? Is he pulling away because he thinks I will judge him? Did he find someone more suited for his tastes?

"Is this why you hold back from me? Because you like BDSM stuff? I mean, I've never really been into this, but I'm willing to try. I like you Ian." I tell him, and his eyes get wide.

He takes the box from my hand then pulls me to his chest. I get lost in his aqua eyes, and he groans before attacking my mouth. I grip his dark hair tight and kiss him harder, moaning into his mouth. I lick under his lower lip, and he opens for me. He tastes like the sea and honey. He releases me, and I hold onto his shoulders to keep my balance.

A storm rages outside, and I whimper as he nips down my neck to my collarbone.

"I don't need anything but you, Skye," he whispers before moving back to my lips and gently moving me against the wall.

Caspian

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I ’ve stalked her for most of her snooping, without her even knowing.

When she got to the kink stuff, seeing her inquisitive expression, tilted head, and adorable ‘ninja’ getup was too much.

I needed to fuck the cute out of her. I push her further into the wall, my body molding to hers as my heart goes into overdrive. “I shouldn’t have you here like this.” I whisper into her hair, trailing my chin up the side of her face. “But forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest.”

She shivers and whispers my name, but I continue on while trying to logically reason with myself. “Even if I can’t ever tell you why.”

There’s a pause, and all I can hear is her breathing hard. “So, I’m forbidden, but you can’t tell me why?”

“Normally.” I say moving back, letting my siren abilities tingle through me and release in the air. She audibly gasps. I let out a low sigh, loving the feeling of my powers being set free.

Does she even realize how tight she’s squeezing my arms? Or how her normally bright green eyes have darkened to the color of a leaf, sitting deep under a canopy of shade? She’s drowning in my lust, and she doesn’t even know it. “But, I’m not forbidden now?”

My head moves on its own accord as it dips down to allow my lips to trace against the arch of her soft neck. As they trail lightly against her, it produces a moan, and I’m a fucking goner. Screw the rules. “Forbidden or not, I’m not stopping.”

I let the tsunami hit, no longer able to hold back the rising tide.

I grab her by the throat and steer her to the bed, where I waste no time ripping off her shirt, then

bra, and she's ripping at mine. Her rough nails claw into my back on the way up, no doubt leaving angry trail lines, and I suck air through my teeth, loving the pain. I'm not sure how much longer I can be soft and easy with her. It's never been my way, and I'm ready to be free with her. Ravage her like she needs and deserves.

I drive my mouth to one of her peaked nipples, making her cry out while I gently bite down and swirl my tongue around the tip. My other hand finds her wet heat still covered, but I massage her nonetheless.

"Ah, Ian!" The sound makes me start to dribble out the tip of my dick. I swear her voice alone could make me fucking cum so hard in my pants like a teenage boy it's not even funny. I need to be buried in her and fast.

"Shorts," she begs as she grabs at my jeans. Her hands are shaking, no doubt from the lust, and she's struggling to get them unbuttoned.

I'm not sure how I'm going to control my powers. They are so built up from me restricting them, but I have to try. If I'm not careful, I could kill her. To release a full Siren's powers on a Human is extremely dangerous and at times fatal. I step out of my jeans, loving how her hungry eyes trail down my body before landing on my sprung cock. She bites her bottom lip and moans, making me shudder.

"You like what you're seeing, little siren?" I ask in a low voice. The influence of my power rattles my voice going straight to her, and she's enveloped in it as she throws her head back, arching her back. I take a second to appreciate the view of her flat, tanned stomach and perky breasts.

"Fucking perfection." I grunt before doing as I was commanded and slowly pull down her shorts. I lick and kiss down the plane of her stomach to her thighs as I go, her arousal hitting my senses in full force, and I take a deep breath in, loving her scent.

"Fuck, you smell good." I mumble and finish pulling off her bottoms.

I step back as I slowly spread her legs and appreciate her beauty, but the power hitting her is giving me no time as she reaches up and squeezes at her own breasts, moaning. She wants it badly, and so do I.

Watching her like this is so fucking hot.

"Scoot back and flip over." Her eyes crack open still swimming in heat, but she stops pleasing herself and does as I command. My cock twitches as she makes a show of slowly getting on her stomach and licking her lips. That image is going to forever sear itself into my mind.

"On your hands and knees." My voice is rough, and I'm losing control. I can see the blue glow of my eyes start, and I can't let her see.

She does as I ask, and I immediately climb on the bed and position myself behind her. No more waiting. She starts to beg for me when I trail my hard cock between her soaking wet lips, but doesn't get to finish her plight before I give in and slam into her.

I let out a cry of pure fucking pleasure at the same time she does. I'm enveloped in her tight, wet heat, and I've never felt anything better. While I'm still buried in her balls deep, fighting every instinct to keep going, I lean forward over her back and bite at her shoulder, giving her the only warning she's going to get, "I'm not going to be gentle, Skye."

"I…*ah*-" Whatever she was going to say ends in a loud moan as I pull out and slam back in, squeezing hard at her ass cheeks as I go and losing myself in the pleasure.

"Fuck, you feel like heaven." I moan as she cries out.

"Oh, God!" Her build up is coming and mine is too. Way too fast.

I needed this to last, but we've both been denying ourselves to each other for too long. Neither of us stood a chance. I reach around and squeeze at her bouncing breasts, trying to get as much in one

hand as I can.

I'm so close to blowing up in her, the light of my eyes are shining at full force now. I have to drop her breasts and grip the back of her neck instead, pushing her face into the pillow. I can't let her see.

"I'm about- AH!" She's there, pulsing around my cock, screaming my name, and I give in, grunting out as euphoria takes over my mind. I go to shut my eyes and ride out the pleasure with her, and that's when I see it.

Fuck.

There, in plain sight, is the glowing sigil of my family crest, a crown, on the back of her right shoulder blade.

The sign that signifies my mate. I watch in amazement and realize the same is happening to me when I recognize the pain that is searing into my shoulder blade in the same spot.

It's official.

Skye Banks is my fated mate.

I release her neck and pull out before rolling onto my back beside her to give her room. "That was." She clears her throat and then moans as she rolls onto hers and cuddles next to me, kissing my neck seductively. "Amazing."

"You keep that up and round two will be now." I warn as I squeeze her hip. "I can't fucking believe it."

She says something as she continues her pursuit on my neck, and I groan, closing my eyes. I'm hard again and ready. "I knew you were meant to be mine forever. You're mine, Skye Banks, now you can never leave me."

She pauses, and I realize my mistake, still being driven mad by lust. Her lips leave my neck, and her body pulls back from mine. I open my eyes.

Shit.

"*Forever*?" She balks. I watch as she scoots to the end of the bed, grabbing up her clothes as she goes. "It was just sex, Ian. I mean it was incredible, and I do like you, but it's still too soon."

I get up and pull on my jeans. "Just sex?" I know she's fucking lying. I see the proof on her damn skin. She's mated to a Siren Prince and has no doubt been feeling our supernatural bond that has to be a hell of a lot stronger than some Human to Human connect; and yet, I'm just sex.

"Yeah, Ian. Sex. Amazing sex. Phenomenal sex. But just sex." She reiterates while I try to keep my jaw from dropping. Instead, I clench it tight while I remember to breathe.

"Wow. Just fucking sex." I'm pissed. As I should be. What the fuck kind of mate claims you're a one off after sealing a bond with you?

"I'm not trying to act like we don't have something building here, Ian. But you can't just declare I'm yours forever after we've had sex for the first time. Ha, the way you have been acting lately, I thought you were planning to break up with me."

She pauses, and I study the irritation on her face. "Not declare… You what? Love me? It's way too soon. It's both out of the blue and just fucking-" She growls out in frustration. "I don't know. I don't know what I'm trying to say, I just need to think. So many changes have been happening lately… And I'm just not ready."

She heads for the door, and I whirl around, watching her go, both pissed and hurt. "Fine! I get it! I said the wrong thing but-" Fuck, I want to tell her! "I just. It doesn't matter, I said something out of feelings for you, and you claim I was just some random lay, Skye! It's fucked up."

She scoffs and shakes her head; I can see the tears in her eyes. We are both wrong here. I shouldn't have come on too strong, and she shouldn't be lying to my face. But I'm willing to work

through this, so why can't she just pause, take a breath and talk this out instead of running off? "I need space. Time."

I step closer. I'm about to reach out and pull her back to me. Make her listen. "Just fucking stay, and let's talk about it." I beg, hating that I even am. Does she really just think of me as a random fuck? Is she purposely rejecting me? She couldn't possibly since she didn't even know what's on her back.

She gives me one last look telling me to stay away from her, and then she's gone.

I'VE CALLED her an embarrassing amount of times.

I've called Eli, too. He answered once and said he wasn't sure what I did to Skye, but if it's this bad to stay away. Let her calm down.

How am I the one that fucked up? We both did! I had a reason for the statement, and now, I'm sure I just need to tell her the truth. I have to.

Humans have known about us before, and she means too much to me just to shove this off. Maybe if I told her the truth, all of it, pointing out our mate marks, she would understand? Has she even seen it yet?

I arrive at school in a pissed off and way too desperate mood, after getting zero sleep and breaking way too much shit in my house; only for both Eli and her to completely ignore me.

It breaks me.

Bad.

I watch them walk by and on like I was nothing more in her life than a stranger, and she doesn't even have the decency to hear me out. That's not her, or at least, I thought it wasn't. My eye catches Pearl staring at me as she smiles like a predator closing in on their kill.

I smirk back as an evil plan takes fold.

Skye wants to think she needs space and can just push me aside when she feels like it.

Fine.

I'll show her just what she's missing.

Skye

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Last night started off great. Until he had to go and ruin everything. *He loves me? I'm his forever?*

We just met. I still barely know him. Yeah, we have a connection. A crazy, wild and wonderful connection, but what does that matter when he is still hiding things from me?

I never did get to the bottom of his dirty little secret. He came home too soon and caught me. Though, I can't say I much minded what came after. The way we connected physically and spiritually was amazing, and it freaked me out. I'll admit I may have overreacted a bit, but come on. He has been distant and distracted, in no way shape or form did I think he was secretly pining for me and planned to marry me someday. I thought this was just a physical thing for the time being, and I had accepted that.

I just lost the love of my life. I'm still healing. Dealing with the shame and guilt I feel every time I kiss or hold or fuck someone that's not Brady. I'm not ready for someone new to swoop in and take Brady's place. Eli is one thing. I have known him almost my whole life. I don't know Ian. Plain and simple. I think we need to take a step back. He needs to come to terms with how I feel, and if he can understand and accept it, then I hope we can get to the *forever* stage at some point.

I get home late, not even climbing in bed. After I left Ian's house, I walked along the beach. Well okay. I got lost. Me in my own home town. Goes to show how much is going on inside my head. I finally found the cliff where I last saw Brady and sat down for a long talk with him. I only wish he could have responded. Told me that it's okay to move on. That I shouldn't feel this guilt anymore.

That Bash calling Eli, "Dada," is okay. I left there after watching the sunrise one last time with him, then walked home. Meg passed me with her board and said if I don't go out on the waves with

her soon, she will set up an intervention. I made plans to go with her after school soon and then watched her for a minute as she ran into the surf. So carefree, nothing drowning her mind daily.

I reached the house just as my dad was leaving for work. He asked if I was okay, and I shrugged. I know we will be having a chat later, and I am not looking forward to it.

I slip into my bedroom and smile at Eli and Bash, cuddled up together on the bed. He no longer lies on top of our chests and takes up half the damn bed. I can't believe how big he's getting. Soon, he will be walking and talking. I just can't. So many things are changing right now, and I just need something, anything to stay the way it is.

I tip-toe past and slide into my bathroom, gently shutting the door, careful not to wake them. I turn the shower on and strip out of my sweaty clothes, careful when removing my top. My shoulder is throbbing, and I don't know why.

I test the water then step in under the spray, letting it wash away all my demons and insecurities. I groan as a new sensation hits my skin. Oh my god, water has never felt this good before. It's almost orgasmic. I stay in way after it's gone cold, but I just don't want to leave.

"Skye, you okay?" Eli asks, opening the bathroom door a crack. I sigh and shut the water off, then grab a towel. Eli's eyes bug, and he stomps over to me. "Did you get a brand or something?" I scoff and push him away when he touches my sore spot. I turn to see what he's talking about.

"What the hell is that?" I shout quietly when I notice the new little crown marking on my shoulder blade. It's tiny, and if I wasn't currently staring into the mirror, I would have missed it. How the hell did I get that? Am I seriously losing my mind and starting to forget things?

"I don't know, but it's kinda cool looking, at least. I'm going to grab Bash and get him some food." He places a kiss on my head, then leaves me in my thoughts.

I COME out of the bathroom a little while later, and Eli is standing there with Bash. He's holding a banana and breaking off little bites. "Damamaaa," he coos, and I smile. Eli gives me a smirk, and I roll my eyes. I still can't believe he called Eli, 'Dada' before he called me Mama. If he wasn't so damn cute, I would call him a little traitor.

"Good morning, handsome man," I coo then take him from Eli so he can get dressed.

"You got in late last night. With a new tattoo. I might add. So, I take it that things went well with Ian?" I snort, and he stops, turning to face me.

"I don't know where the hell I got that mark from. It just appeared, and no last night was a disaster. We slept together, then he went all, 'you're my forever,'. Then we got in a huge fight, and I left. I don't know what's going on, but I do know that I need some space."

I leave it at that and go get ready for school. I am cranky, exhausted, and pissed. Today is not going to be a good day. Those Sea Skanks better keep out of my way.

"Skye, I think it's time you talk to Ian. The sad puppy dog looks, and the way he's been blowing up my phone means he cares and doesn't want to lose you." Eli hands me a cracker with cheese, and I take a bite. My stomach has been off lately, and my chest pains have started to make an appearance again.

I grunt, and he sighs. "I understand where you're coming from Skye, but to go from dating to icing him out is just cruel." I snap my attention to him and give him a glare. He holds his hand up at me, and I take a deep breath. I don't know what has gotten into me. I am so irritable lately. The littlest thing can set me off.

I scoop Bash up and hold him in my arms. He is the only thing that makes me smile these past few days, and I know Eli is scared.

"I know he scared you. I know change is happening, and it's a lot for you to handle at the moment. But just know that he cares for you, and you're hurting him. His last phone call, he begged me to have you call him."

I sigh and hand Bash to him, then take another bite of cheese. Nothing is appealing to me right now except maybe fish or shrimp. I wonder if we have any?

"Okay, I get it. I'll stop bringing it up, but at least I can say I tried." Eli comments, and it pulls me out of my shrimp fantasy. I shake my head and groan.

"Do you think I'm making a big mistake?" I whisper, and he leans closer, wrapping his arm around me.

"I can't tell you what to do here, Skye. This is your life. You have to worry about yourself and Bash. But I saw the way you were together. He made you happy. I agree it might be too soon, but Skye, it's not that far fetched. You're incredible and easy to love. I know I do."

I wipe a tear from my eye and relax into his comfort. "I love you too, Eli, but you're different. You're not some stranger that popped up one day and decided I was going to be their forever." I laugh and place Bash on the floor with his toys, then turn to face Eli.

"You know what's funny. Before he went making declarations I had this vision. I don't know if it was from the intense orgasm or maybe a day dream, but I saw us. All of us swimming in the sea together, laughing, kissing, and having fun. We were happy. I thought maybe I was falling for him. Then he had to open his mouth. It's just too soon."

I sigh and kiss his cheek. "But I will talk to him tomorrow at school okay? It's time I faced him. I just hope in the end I don't lose him."

Ian didn't bother talking to me today in class. He wouldn't even look at me. I rush out of Ms. Scuttle's classroom to the cafeteria. I need to talk to him. I'm not ready to declare feelings, but I do miss him, and Eli was right, I have been being unnaturally cruel.

I reach the door at the same time as Coral, and she gives me a soft smile, opening it for me. I enter the lunch room and freeze. My heart stops, and my chest feels as if multiple people are stabbing me.

My feet move me closer to the scene of the crime, and I fight with my brain to stop them, to turn away, leave. But they don't stop moving until I reach Ian.

Pearl is sitting on his lap, whispering into his ear as he holds her tight. He laughs loudly, and I

think I may be sick.

"Ian," I gasp and his ocean blue eyes meet mine. But they don't hold the same glow that they usually do when he looks at me. His once blue eyes are now a steely gray. Hard, cruel. He gives me a smirk and presses a kiss on Pearl's head.

She sighs and gives me a smug look. "I told you Skye, you're a worthless whore. No one will want you long term, and if you didn't kill Brady, he would have been mine, too."

My heart starts to race, and my chest hurts the worst it ever has. I fall to my knees gasping for air. Strong arms grip me and pull me up to my feet.

"What a drama queen," Pearl mutters, and the girls around her laugh. I clutch Eli's arm and take one more look at Ian. His brow is furrowed, but he doesn't move or say anything. I nod my head and wipe my eyes. Eli lets me go, and I take off.

"You fucked up asshole," Eli growls before coming after me.

"Wait, Skye," Ian yells, but it's too late. He made his hole in the sand. Now, he can stay buried in it.

Caspian

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

It's been two days since things blew up in the cafeteria. Everything has gotten worse. I'm big enough of a man to admit when I fucked up…and I did, big time.

After me begging Eli to have Skye sext me, I finally got a response back from him, but it was only to tell me the device I've been carrying around is called a phone, and when you message someone on it, it's called a text. Not a sext, which is when you are dirty talking through text messages.

I'm an idiot.

Either way. I've begged and pleaded with her through text to meet me and hear me out. I'm ready to tell her the truth. All of it. She needs to know to understand me, but instead, she's ignoring me. I can tell Pearl being with me though is breaking her slowly because she almost said something to me in the hall this morning, but didn't. If I didn't think the jealous route would work, I would have shoved Pearl away a long time ago.

But I'm desperate.

Things at home are getting worse also. It's almost like the turmoil of my life is spilling out from any and every point it can at this point. Daryn came up last night to tell us that my dad is going to have no choice but to announce war as our kingdom is still invaded thanks to Kassia being missing.

I know that evil bitch is still alive and plotting this. I'm not that lucky to have her dead. I'm screwing everything up so bad here, I'm not sure what's the point of hanging around now. Still, I'm waiting for Skye to at least hear me out. I may have to return home sooner than planned, but I can't leave her without an explanation.

I can't leave my mate.

Pearl is clinging onto me like a wet towel, and it's really fucking annoying. Why is she acting like this? I mean, yeah, I'm using her to make Skye jealous, but she has to know I don't give a shit about her. I push her off and grab my premade saltwater bottle and chug it. She doesn't seem to mind because other than her slutty friends, there isn't much of an audience, and I know that's what she aims for more than anything.

They start their chatter, and I ignore it like usual until I hear Skye's name.

"Shh!" One of them says, hitting the arm of a girl with Jet black hair. I never bothered to learn any of their names.

This makes Pearl throw her head back in an obnoxious manner that makes me want to roll my eyes. "It's okay Alexis, Ian is no longer team slut. Right, baby?" She asks, and I mumble yeah whatever and pretend I'm not listening to whatever shit they are about to say.

"Dumb bitch doesn't even check her stuff in the locker room. It was easy to get the crushed pills in there and swirl the powder around so she couldn't tell it was tampered with."

The black haired girl continues, and when she sees me watching her, she explains. "Skye always drinks the same energy drink powder crap before surfing. She just adds it to her water bottle. She's gotten out of hand with this need to fuck an entire football team. Brady would be rolling over in his grave if he had one. Instead, she surfs over the spot he died, like the piece of shit she is."

"It was time to teach her a lesson. Don't worry, it's tasteless, she'll never know." Pearl puts her hand on my arm, and my heart beat matches my anger and fear.

I shove her off and stand. "So, what? You fucking drugged her!?" I ask incredulously.

That gets a laugh from her and the rest, but when she sees my face, it turns from righteous to nervous. "It's time for her to join Brady."

What in the actual fuck?

I'm so enraged I can't help the roar that leaves my lips or what I do next as I swipe my arm across the table throwing all their shit to the ground, while they squeal and back away from it. For good measure as the teachers rush over, I flip the fucking table, hoping it lands on those stupid cunts.

It doesn't, and I don't care anymore about it.

I turn and leave, pushing anyone out of my way that might slow me down.

I have to get to Skye before she gets in the water. Hell, before she drinks the poison.

I break into a run when I get to the road and realize I might not have the time to run around and look for her, so I pull my phone out to get Finnely to drive me. Fuck how it looks.

But it's dead. SHIT! I don't know why I didn't immediately think to call Skye anyways.

Now I'm sprinting, dodging cars, and hopping fences. I needed to get my charger and pray she answers my call or at least sees a text. I could check this whole cove, and I might not ever find her.

Before I can make it up the driveway and into the house, Kelby is rushing outside. "You aren't going to belie-"

I ignore him and rush into the house, letting the front door bang open and run to find my charger. Fuck, I was wasting time. My panic was making me shake from nerves, and I felt sick. I would ask Kelby for his phone, but he doesn't have Skye or Eli's numbers. Fuck. Why didn't we think to give them to him?

"What's wrong?" He asks, seeing my panic as he trails me to my room. Right as I go to open the door, he shouts, "WAIT!", but I don't, there's no time.

The door flies open, but instead of turning my eyes to the nightstand where I know my charger is, they find Kassia instead, alive and in Human form sitting on my bed. "Lover, I missed you!"

I'm so shocked for a second I don't move, but then I remember what I needed to do. "Why the fuck

are you here?" I growl, plugging the cord into my phone. She goes to touch me, and I release my powers, and she shrieks back.

"Don't fucking touch me!" I glance at my phone, waiting for the fucker to get to one percent so I can turn it on. I look back to the evil bitch on my bed. "Do you know what kind of chaos you've created in my kingdom!?" I shout, and she stands now, realizing I'm seriously pissed and dangerous.

"DO YOU KNOW THE CHILDREN, INFANTS THAT YOU MURDERED, YOU STUPID BITCH!?" I scream out.

She whimpers, tears filling her eyes and immediately spilling down her face. "I didn't do it, I-"

I cuss and look at my phone, turning it on right as soon as I see one percent on the screen. I look at Kelby, ignoring Kassia cowering in the corner.

"Lock this bitch up. Tell Finnely to get the car running and wait for me, as soon as I get in she better drive as fast as she can!"

"What's going on?" He asks again, as I wait for the phone to ring, calling Eli first. No answer.

"FUCK!" I roar, ending it and calling Skye. My hands are shaking so bad now I'm barely able to control my movements. "Just do it!" I yell at him.

No answer from Skye. I should have known. I type out a quick text the best I can, telling her to call me and that I heard she was in danger, before copying and pasting the same text to Eli. I stare at my phone waiting and praying to see one of them typing back.

Nothing.

I'm frantic now, and I hear Kassia flat out bawling in the corner. My full powers of rage are released, and I can't even help it. All I can see is red right now.

I try to calm down and think. Alexis said she drinks it before surfing. She was missing from lunch, so they meant she was going surfing and said it was where Brady drowned. I pull up Instagram and pray to fuck she updated it, and like a miracle, I see her last post ten minutes ago. A filtered picture of her board sticking straight up out of the sand in front of hectic waves with a dark storm on the horizon.

Why the hell would she surf during a storm?

I look at the caption. *I feel like the storms match the rising emotions of my life, melded in the waves. All there is to do is ride it out.*

Dammit, Skye!

Eli would kick her ass if he knew what she was planning, and now, there's a chance she's drugged on top of everything while getting in the water.

I pass Kelby in the hall, tearing out of the house and into the waiting car, screaming at Finnely to drive and pointing the way, as my leg bounces impatiently and my heart pounds. When she screeches to a halt on the road, I immediately bail out of the car not bothering to shut my door. I race across the sand the best I can as the wind picks up.

The storm is here, and I see I'm too late. She's already on the water.

And she's not alone.

I keep running as I see two other riders on the dangerous waves with her, and I use my abilities to zone in with a closer look. Bonnie and Pearl.

Fuck!

I watch as Bonnie heads right for Skye, who looks extremely unsteady.

There wasn't time. This was going to end bad, and I was too far away to stop it. I keep running, and I don't care that I'm lit up like a Christmas tree from my powers.

I kick off my shoes ready to swim to her, but with the force of the wave, and the wind helping Bonnie's attack, the crash could kill Skye from the impact alone.

I do the only thing I can and roar out as I let my power reach its full potential and raise my arms in the air, watching my blue magic trail through the hectic wind. A second before the crash, I freeze the waves and everything around it. I hear Skye scream, the momentum about to make her fly off her board, I change the wind and keep her safe, but Bonnie and her board crash violently into the frozen wave.

Good. I lock them in place and slowly release Skye to safety, letting her balance on her board before she falls into the water at a normal rate. My head is swimming from using too much power.

I'm using more than any normal Kaiman, Siren or Nix has the ability to. I'm pulling my ancestral power. My royal power. But it's still too much, and pain hits my head and chest, and I stagger at my feet, reaching up to wipe the blood coming from my nose.

"IAN, STOP!" I didn't realize I closed my eyes, but when I open them and clear the double vision, I see Bonnie trapped under the water, inside the wave, frantically trying to get out, and Skye looking terrified.

"YOU'RE KILLING HER!" She shouts again.

I look around at the situation to realize I don't even see Pearl, and then a hand on my shoulder makes me jump, and I finally drop my powers. A second later, hearing a coughed gasp from Bonnie finally getting air.

"*Ian*..." I look over to Eli with frantic eyes as I realize how bad I messed up.

They saw.

They saw everything.

What have I done?

Skye is struggling to help Bonnie back to shore with both of their boards. She still looks uneasy.

"They drugged her." I say, taking the help Eli offers and grab onto his arm to stay steady. He just nods, and I don't know if he understands what I'm trying to say.

"I can't-" I can barely talk, and everything is starting to go fuzzy. I needed to get back to my Kingdom to replenish my powers. I pulled too much.

"You did good. I need to help them." He pulls off his shirt and kicks off his shoes, and I give him one last nod as he takes off into the water to help.

Have I done good? Did he really see what happened?

Who I am?

I give them all one more look, and I don't have any choice. I have to return home.

Mate or not, I jump into the water and melt my clothes off, letting my powers transform me. I would be facing treason, possible capture, and war going home. I wasn't sure if I'd even survive to make it back up to the surface again and to her, but I didn't have a choice. The only way I would survive the pull of ancestral power is by immediately restoring it. I had to leave her.

I may have fucked up for good. I swim as hard as I can, feeling minutes left before I might pass out. It didn't matter. Any of it.

Skye was safe, and I'd do it all over again to keep it that way.

Even face the storm beneath the waves.

Epilogue

The harsh cold water pulls me down until I can't breathe. My long black dress is not helping. No, I can't do this. This was a mistake. I'm so sorry, Brady. Please forgive me. I just missed you so much. I need you. I can't do this without you. I fight to kick, I reach the surface long enough to take a short breath then the waves pull me under again. My limbs grow tired. The weight of my son is too much to bear. I'm drowning, and it's all my fault.

I open my eyes to an ocean blue gaze, filled with fear and fury. Strong arms are wrapped around me as they fight to lift me from the current. A shiny blue tail catches my eye, and I fight for one last breath before giving into the storm.

"IAN," I gasp as I come to on the beach, this time in the daylight, and Eli is holding me. I look around, and he shakes his head. "It was him. Ian was the one who saved me that night." I whisper, and Eli nods.

I look off at the sea, searching for the man who not only saved my life but gave me happiness again, but he is gone now, and I know I wouldn't see him again.

He said I was his forever, but he was never mine. He'd always belong to the storm beneath the waves. I think deep down I always knew that, but did he have to take a part of my soul with him?

The End

Afterword

Thank you so much for reading our book! We hope you loved our version of a reverse little mermaid retelling with a twist!

If you have a moment and enjoyed the book, please come tell us what you thought.

Reviews are truly an author's life source!!!

Want more Skye and her guys?

Book Two will be coming Next year!

Preorder now

The Tide Above The Shore

https://books2read.com/u/bWE19G

Trigger Warnings

We'd love you all to read our book, but please be aware, it contains multiple triggers, not limited to: language and underage drinking, teen mom, and underage pregnancy, death and grief, PTSD and depression, severe bullying, suicide, and suicidal thoughts while pregnant. There is a past relationship that some might take as cheating, but it's not.

If you or anyone you know is dealing with bad thoughts.

Please reach out to the **National Suicide Prevention Hotline** at **1-800-273-8255.**

Thank You's From Amber & Chelsii

Whew! We did it. It was a rollercoaster ride, but we pulled through and got this done and I couldn't have done it without all of you:

To Chelsii: Thank you for going on this journey with me and sticking through to the last word! I am so blessed to have you as a co-author and friend. I can't wait to see what else this series becomes!

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To my ARC team and Peachy Keen readers: Thank you so much for reading our book baby and reviewing. Also the gorgeous edits just make my day. I love seeing how you envision our story.

To Chelsii's team: Thank you so much for everything you have done as well! I am so grateful to you all and have enjoyed our chats!

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I know I am forgetting some thank you's and I am so sorry, so, thank you to everyone and especially to my followers and readers.

I wouldn't be here without any of you!

About the Author Amber Nicole

Before accompanying her military husband across the United States, Amber Nicole was born and raised in upstate NY. An avid reader and baker, she always has something cooking, whether in the kitchen or in her mind. *Fallen Memories* was her debut novel and she has a few more books planned for this upcoming year.

She has two incredible children who help inspire her every day, and a husband that pushes her to follow her dreams. She is an animal lover and has many of her own.

Stay tuned for more from this up-and-coming author.

Link to Facebook group

If you want to come hang out with me and talk about books, come—join my author's group!

https://www.facebook.com/groups/ambernicolereadersgroup/?ref=share

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